Virgin Mary Outside the Canonical Gospels

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May/2026

ABSTRACT

The historicity of Mary, when perceived globally, encompasses a range of perspectives, from the suspicion that she did not exist, since for these extremist skeptics (mythicists) the New Testament is a myth, to the hypothesis that she was, in fact, an adulterous woman (Jewish version), who later prostituted herself, to the belief that she was a virgin (canonical, apocryphal and Islamic versions), who gave birth to a son without carnal relations (Immaculate Conception), was the mother of God, who even after childbirth remained a virgin, and made appearances to devotees (Catholic version). Mentions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in texts outside the canonical gospels can be divided as follows:

1) Praiseworthy mentions: in the apocryphal gospels - Mary is a virgin and the mother of the son of God.

2) Moderately laudatory mentions: in Islamic scriptures: Quran and Hadiths - Mary is pure, but she is not the mother of the son of God, as Jesus is only a prophet of Allah.

3) Pejorative mentions: in the Talmud and the Sefer Toledoth Yeshu collection, where Mary is not a virgin, but rather an adulterous mother, therefore Jesus is an illegitimate son.

Keywords: Virgin Mary, Miriam, Stada, ben Stada, adulteress, Pandera,

Front page: Islamic illustration of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus.

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I. Introduction

I.01. The Problem of Historicity

If history is written by the victors, as the saying goes, that is, if truth is imposed by the force of the powerful, many believe that the version of the most powerful current is the historical version. Thus, it has become an almost universal belief that the Canonical Gospels transmit the most historical version of both the facts and the sayings of Jesus, because they have become the texts of general acceptance in the Christian world. That is, what is not reported in the Canonical Texts is not an authentic gospel. However, from a historical and textual criticism perspective, this belief raises many questions, because when we study the formation of the gospels from a historical perspective, independent of preaching and evangelization, what we find is a great rivalry and conflict between the theological currents of the early years in the choices of texts that were considered authentic and those that were considered inauthentic, before and during the formation of the New Testament. In early Christianity, each Christian community followed different texts from other communities, until the textual unification in the 4th century CE. This did not immediately end the controversies, as some Christian currents continued to follow the rejected texts in the canonical list of New Testament texts of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, an ardent opponent of Arianism, a theological doctrine rival to that defended by Athanasius, Trinitarianism. In a letter from 367 CE, Athanasius was the first person to identify the same 27 books of the New Testament used today as canonical. Until then, different lists of works to be read in churches were used. A milestone in the development of the New Testament canon is his Easter letter

written in 367 CE, generally known as the "39th Easter Letter". Pope Damasus I, Bishop of Rome in 382 CE, promulgated a list of books that contained the same books proposed by Athanasius. A synod at Hippo in 393 CE repeated the list of Athanasius and that of Pope Damasus I (without the epistle to the Hebrews), and a council at Carthage in 397 repeated it again.

However, scholars debate whether Athanasius' list in 367 CE was the basis for later lists. Since Athanasius' canon is, among the Church Fathers, the one that most closely resembles the canon used by modern Protestant churches, many Protestant theologians point to Athanasius as the "Father of the Canon." He included in his New Testament list the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas, which were later removed from canonical approval. Most contemporary biblical historians believe that the Canonical Gospels were composed before the Apocryphal Gospels, the former between 70 and 110 CE, and the latter from the 3rd century CE onward. The first to be composed was the Gospel of Mark, which, in the oldest manuscripts, ends at 16:08, and in later manuscripts and current editions ends at 16:20. Therefore, it is considered by Textual Criticism, along with the Pericope of the Adulterous Woman (John 7:53 – 8:11), to be the two most extensive interpolations in the Canonical Gospels. However, it is not possible to arrive at certainty, since both gospels (canonical and apocryphal), before being transcribed into written form, were taken from oral accounts, so it is not possible to know how much these oral communications were already enriched with myths and embellishments at the time of written composition.

In a way, it's important to note that, since the authors of the sacred scriptures were not historians but rather avid followers in the dissemination of these texts for proselytizing purposes, canonization becomes a more ideological and political process than a technical process of historical rigor. Thus, evangelization is more important than historicity; if the myth convinces, then it is historical. With this, persuasion becomes an instrument of veracity; that is, what

convinces becomes truth. Therefore, for the historian, it becomes difficult, and often impossible, to separate what is factual account from what is manipulation for the purpose of evangelization. Just as Christian authors sought to persuade through laudatory communication, the authors of pejorative texts strove to dissuade by creating a hostile version of the characters and episodes of the Gospels. Deciding who holds the historical version is very difficult, since we have no contemporary accounts from impartial authors, only from confessional authors. Now, it is quite noticeable that the Apocryphal Gospels carry more mythological character than the Canonical Gospels, but that does not mean the latter are entirely historical and the Apocrypha absolutely mythological. Both incorporate history and myth, with the difference that one gospel may possess more myths, or more history, than the others, whether when comparing the Apocrypha among themselves, or the Canonical Gospels among themselves, or one with the other. In short, from the point of view of historical and textual rigor, canonization of texts is not synonymous with authenticity, but with ideological homologation.

Another factor that considerably reduced the number of available sources was the destruction of so many works by the Catholic Church during Antiquity and the Middle Ages—that is, those that hindered its missionary project. Of the destroyed works, it seems that the current that most bothered the Church in the first centuries was the Gnostic current, given the large number of heresiologies written by the priests against this Christian movement, as well as the small number of surviving works of this Christian denomination. The availability would be even smaller if it had not been for the fantastic discovery of the Gnostic library of Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. This discovery revolutionised the study of the history of early Christianity. Few know, but the number of Apocryphal Gospels is much greater than the number of just four Canonical Gospels. The edition by Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Plese brought together 37 apocryphal texts preserved in their entirety or in fragments (see: EHRMAN, 2011). Therefore, the current study of early Christianity,

without taking into account the apocryphal texts, is a major omission, something like a mutilated history.

The criticism from modern Christians that the Apocryphal Gospels reproduce comical miracles of Jesus does not entirely exempt the canonical texts from humor. For example, while in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy (chapter I) and in the Quran 19:30-31, Jesus spoke in the cradle, still a baby, shortly after his birth, a no less comical miracle appears in the Gospel of Luke 1:44, when he (Jesus) leaped for joy (ἐσκίρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει – eskirtesen agalliasei) in his mother's womb, while still pregnant, when he heard Elizabeth's greeting; that is, Jesus could understand people's speech even inside the womb. The leaping of the fetus Jesus in Mary's womb is also mentioned in the Protoevangelium of James 12:2, with the difference that the child did not leap for joy, but simply leaped and blessed Elizabeth (ευλόγησεν σε – eulogesen se). In short, the ironic thing is that Jesus was already blessing people from his mother's womb before he was born.

I.02. What is Textual Criticism?

Textual analysis is a science that deals with the identification of textual variants, different reviews, or distinct versions of texts, whether manuscripts or printed. These texts can vary in date from the oldest writings in cuneiform characters, printed on clay tablets, to unpublished versions of works by 21st-century authors. In the past, when graphic reproduction of literary works did not yet exist, scribes, who were responsible for manually copying documents, were perhaps almost all literate, but many were simply copyists, reproducing letters without even understanding the meanings of the words. Thus, unintentional alterations occurred during the transcription process when orthographically copied. Furthermore, intentional alterations occurred for political, religious, and censorship reasons.

The goal of a textual critic's work is to find the best understanding of the creation and historical transmission of a text and its variants. The result of this endeavour may be the creation of a Critical Edition, arriving at a methodically collated text. Therefore, faced with many recensions, versions, and textual variants in different manuscripts of the same work, and if the textual critic does not possess the original text (autograph), then techniques of Textual Criticism can be used to reconstruct the original text as closely as possible. In other words, a critical edition attempts, firstly, to reconstruct an archetype that is as close to the original text as the evidence allows and, secondly, to reveal the textual history of its reception and transmission through the analysis of manuscript variants. Usually, a critical edition also involves the creation of a genealogical tree, arranged in families or lineages of manuscripts, which allows the editor to choose redactions based not merely on their own preferences, ideological bias, or confessional commitment, but on objective and impartial criteria.

Gordon D. Fee explained the importance of Textual Criticism for the biblical interpreter and translator as follows: “Textual criticism, commonly known in the past as ‘lower criticism,’ in contrast to the well-known ‘higher criticism’ (historical and literary), is the science that compares all known manuscripts of a given work in an effort to trace the history of variants within the text in order to discover its original form. Textual criticism is therefore of special significance to the biblical interpreter in at least three ways:

1) It attempts to determine the authentic words of an author. The first question an interpreter asks is 'what does the text say?', before asking, 'what does the text mean?'

2) Most Christians have access to the New Testament only through translations, and the basic condition in choosing a translation is its accuracy in reproducing the author's original text. Before deciding what any of the words mean, the translator's first concern should be that he or she is translating the very words that the author wrote.

3) A knowledge of the history of textual variation will also help the interpreter to see how the passage was understood during the early history of the Church. In many cases, textual variants are a reflection of the theological interests of the church and the scribe, and sometimes such changes bring one into contact with historical exegesis" (FEE, 2000: 03).

I.03. Textual Transmission in Antiquity

However, the problem with older texts is that many were transmitted orally for centuries before being transcribed into written form, resulting in different versions or recensions of the same work, thus undergoing many alterations and omissions during the period of oral transmission. This is because it is only possible to identify textual alterations from the written record of texts previously transmitted orally. This occurrence is very common in the oldest texts of Hinduism, the Vedas (Sanhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads). Before the creation of copyright law, it was not the authors of the work who possessed the rights to their works, but rather those who transmitted them, whether reciters or religious traditions. In other words, the transmitters of the texts considered themselves the owners.

From the work, they consequently made the desired alterations and omissions. Also, in the past, it was common for an author to attribute the authorship of their work to another more prestigious or famous author, in order to gain more prestige or authority; this practice is called pseudoepigraphy (Greek: ψευδεπιγραφία), and was very frequent in Hinduism, especially in the oldest works, to the point where authors attributed authorship to the gods.

I.04. The Origins of Textual Criticism

This practice was no different with the oldest Greek texts. Concern arose when the large number of textual and redactional differences in the then-existing manuscripts of the epics Iliad and Odyssey was noticed when they were transcribed into written form, since the changes that occurred before the written record are not perceptible, as the texts were transmitted only orally. Therefore, “because the reciters who recited passages from the Iliad and the Odyssey in public occasionally altered the text in order to adapt it to the special occasion or to the very notion of an effective arrangement, many versions circulated even in the earliest times. Subsequently, various 'urban versions' emerged…”. Thus, “around 1990, the number of manuscript traditions had reached 703 for the Iliad and 236 for the Odyssey” (METZGER and EHRMAN, 2005: 197 and 198n2). The first records of a systematic work of collating manuscripts to find which passages might be closest to the original, or to the ancient oral version, as well as the work of restoring the text, are found in the Greek documents of Hellenistic Antiquity, particularly among the librarians of the then magnificent Library of Alexandria, whose collection comprised about 600,000 works, an extraordinary number for the time.

The directors of the Library were concerned and, consequently, mobilised to make available to readers the most accurate editions of the Homeric poems. The first one we have a record of was Zenodotus of Ephesus (325 – 240 BCE), who, even before 274 BCE, carried out a comparison of many manuscripts in order to restore the original text of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Zenodotus' corrections to the texts were made in the following way: he eliminated verses that he observed to be false; he marked other verses as doubtful, but left them in his edition; he transposed the order of the verses and, finally, introduced new redactions that were not current. After Zenodotus, the director of the Library, Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 257 – 180 BCE), in his edition of the Iliad and the Odyssey, employed a variety of critical symbols to indicate his opinion on the authenticity of the passages of the text then marked.

His student and successor, Aristarchus of Somathrace (c. 220 – c. 144 BCE), edited works by half a dozen Greek authors and published two critical editions of Homer's poems, thus supplementing the number of critical symbols his predecessor had used. Therefore, a relatively well-developed academic discipline of literary and textual criticism existed in Antiquity, primarily in Alexandria.

I.05. Textual Problems

A major problem in identifying what is authentic and what is not arises because the earliest accounts were recorded only from memory and transmitted orally, only to be transcribed into written form decades later. Therefore, we do not know how much this oral transmission altered the stories during this period, and even after being recorded in written form, they continued to undergo changes, as demonstrated by the work of New Testament Textual Criticism in comparing manuscripts. Another problem is that the original manuscripts of the four canonical Gospels have not been preserved, making it impossible to ascertain whether they were altered in subsequent manuscripts. The oldest surviving copies, preserved in their entirety or nearly so, date from the 4th and 5th centuries CE. Indeed, we do not even know who the authors were, hence the designation "Gospel according to St. Matthew (κατὰ Ματθαῖον εὐαγγέλιον)", "Gospel according to St. Mark (κατὰ Μᾶρκον εὐαγγέλιον)," etc. The same process occurred with the Apocryphal Texts; they also underwent many alterations, which can be confirmed by comparing the surviving manuscripts. Although both are subject to manipulation, alterations to memorised texts are easier to detect than changes to handwritten texts. The latter can be identified by comparing manuscripts, but orally transmitted texts are not recorded. Alterations to the latter can only be perceived when comparing the recitations of two different reciters of the same text; therefore, we must rely on the memories of these reciters.

For example, when compared, even in the canonical and apocryphal gospels, the discrepancies are glaring. In the passage from the Protoevangelium of James 5:02, there is a divergence, among many others, regarding the length of Mary's gestation in her mother Anne's womb, that is, when she gave birth. Some manuscripts mention that it was "in the ninth month" (τω δε εννατω μηνι – to de emmato meni), other manuscripts "in the eighth month" (τω δε ογδοω μηνι – to de ogdoo meni), and others "in the seventh month" (τω δε εβδομω μηνι – to de ebdomo meni). The critical edition by Bart Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše preferred “in the seventh month” (to de εβδομω μηνι), see: EHRMAN, 2011: 44n29. The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 4, in Latin, mentions “nine months” (mensibus nouem). Therefore, the discrepancies in translations into contemporary languages of this passage do not occur solely due to translator error, but also because the translations were extracted from different manuscripts.

The problems of textual alterations in the New Testament are not new; on the contrary, they are so old that the thinker Celsus, in the 2nd century CE, observed that "Christian believers, like people in a fit of drunkenness, corrupted the Gospels from their original integrity, to a triple, quadruple, and multiple degree, and reshaped them in such a way that they could answer objections" (*Origen Against Celsus* , vol. II, II.27 – CHADWICK, 1953: 90). That is, as new challenges arose regarding the Gospel texts, early Christians altered the wording in order to invalidate the objections. Therefore, textual alterations began very early, most likely during the period of oral transmission, and continued into the written transmission phase, as critical work comparing manuscripts demonstrates.

I.0 6 . Virgins in Myths

Accounts of virgin mothers giving birth to divine children, of a young woman impregnated by a god, of a wife having an adulterous relationship with a deity, and of miraculous births are very common in

ancient myths and religions: Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, Greece, and Rome. To recount them all here would require a text the length of a book. Therefore, Mary is not the first case of "immaculate conception"; the idea was probably drawn from other myths, or even from the Old Testament itself. The difference between the Christian account and the other myths is that in the latter, that is, the conception of a mortal by a god is not an immaculate conception; thus, that mortal becomes an object of worship. In the Gospels, Mary is conceived by the Holy Spirit (πνεύμα ἅγιος – pneuma hagios): “Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18 – NRSVU, 2021). Therefore, when conception is by the Holy Spirit, the woman remains a virgin and is worshipped as a virgin, whereas with the gods of other religions, the woman loses her virginity and is no longer worshipped as a virgin. For example, the goddess Parvati is known in Hinduism as the mother of the gods Ganesha and Kartikeya (also known as Skanda or Murugam), in union with the god Shiva, but she is not worshipped as “Virgin Parvati”. Without a doubt, the worship of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism has become the most popular and universal form of virgin worship among all religions in history; currently there are more than a billion Catholics, although the majority are not practising Christians.

One point of contention is whether Mary, after the birth of Jesus, remained a virgin or had other children, brothers and sisters of Jesus. For Catholics, she remained eternally a virgin and is venerated as such to this day. In contrast, in the Byzantine manuscript of the Sefer Toledoth Yeshu collection, Mary, when she went to Egypt, as we will see later in this study, prostituted herself and had more sons and daughters; that is, in addition to losing her virginity, she prostituted herself, which is even more dishonorable, a double depreciation by the author of this text.

Intriguingly, in the Canonical Gospels, in the passage of Luke 2:07, Jesus is mentioned as the firstborn son (υἱὸν – uion) of Mary

(τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον· – ton uion autes ton prototokon, her firstborn son): “And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn” (Luke 2:07). This suggests that his mother had other children after Jesus' birth, since Jesus was only the firstborn. This is the viewpoint defended by some Protestant and Pentecostal groups. However, in another similar passage, Matthew 1:25, the word πρωτότοκον – prototokon (firstborn) is absent in the NA27 edition, suggesting that Mary gave birth to Jesus and had no further children afterward, therefore remaining eternally a virgin. This is the hypothesis mainly defended by Catholics. However, some modern editions and translations add the word prototokos (firstborn) to the verse Matthew 1:25: “but (Joseph) did not have conjugal relations with her (Mary) until she gave birth to a firstborn son, and he named him Jesus.” The introduction of prototokos in Matthew 1:25 is explained by Roger L. Omanson as follows: The *Textus Receptus,* following *several* uncial manuscripts and most minuscule manuscripts in Greek , inserts the article τόν (the) before υιόν (son) and adds the phrase αυτής τον πρωτότοκον (his firstborn son), which was taken from Luke 2:07 (OMANSON, 2010: 04). Whereas, in the critical edition NA 27 (Nestlé-Aland), the word prototokos (firstborn) in Matthew 1:25 is considered an interpolation to match Luke 2:07, therefore it was omitted. Finally, editions and translations that follow the *Textus Receptus* lineage add the word prototokos (firstborn) to Matthew 1:25, while those that follow the more critical Greek editions of Nestle-Aland omit this term.

I.07. Controversial Translations of Hebrew Words into Greek and Latin

Be-thu-lah is a Hebrew feminine noun meaning virgin. Bethulah appears in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament for Christians) as follows: Rebekah (at 10 years old) is presented as a girl, a virgin whom no man had known: “The young woman (נערה –

naʿărâh) was very beautiful, a virgin (בתולה – bethulah), and no man knew her. She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher, and came back" (Genesis 24:16). In the Septuagint, both the Hebrew words na'arah (young woman) and bethulah (virgin) are translated, in this passage, by the same Greek word παρθένος – parthenos, which means a young unmarried woman, a maiden, or a virgin, 5 therefore the same word for two different Hebrew words, whereas, in the Latin Vulgate, na'arah was translated as "puella" (beautiful young woman) and bethulah as "virgo" (virgin), that is, a distinction was made between na'arah (young woman) and bethulah (virgin). For this reason, some biblical interpreters argue that the distinction needs to be made, since a young woman (na'arah) is not always necessarily a virgin (bethulah).

The book of Judges tells the story of 400 young virgins who had never had intimate relations with a man: "And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins (נערה – na'arah) who had never lain with a man, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan" (Judges 21:12). In this passage, the Hebrew words na'arah and bethulah are mentioned together, reinforcing the need to differentiate between "young woman" and "virgin." "Come down and sit in the dust, O Virgin (בתולה , bethulah), daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans…" (Isaiah 47:1-3). Also, in this passage, the Hebrew word bethulah is translated into Greek as parthenos. "For as a young man marries a virgin (בתולה – bethulah), so shall you marry your sons; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride**,** so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Also, in this passage, bethulah is translated into Greek as παρθένῳ – parthenos (young men), and into Latin as virgine (virgins). However, there are many Hebrew words for "young person" or "youth"; one of them is the word עלם (eh'-lam); which means a young person of sexual maturity at the ideal age for work. And עלם eh'-lem (youth), a young male of ideal age for work. eh'-lem: a masculine noun meaning young person. Its feminine equivalent is

found in the word al-mah. The focus of this term is probably sexual maturity. It connotes an individual who has gone through puberty and is therefore sexually mature. Thus, eh'-lem is the image of an individual who has crossed (or is crossing) the threshold from childhood to adulthood and, as such, is of marriageable age. The feminine form of עלם (eh'-lem) is עלמה (al-mah'). She is a sexually mature woman, of ideal age for work. *עלמה* **(** al-maw) feminine noun, a (strong) young woman. עלמה (eh'-lem): youth, a young woman of ideal working age: *בתולה* – a lmah: The Hebrew word עלמה (al-mah') is often polemically translated as "virgin." A bethulah' (virgin) can be an al-mah (sexually mature young woman) and vice versa; but these two words are not synonymous **.** A bethulah' is not necessarily a young woman, and a young woman is not necessarily a virgin. A nun at 60 years of age is a virgin, by virtue of her vow of chastity, but is not a young woman, while a pregnant teenager at 16 years of age is a young woman, but is not a virgin.

We have already mentioned that Rebekah was a virgin (בתולה , bethulah) who had not known a man. “The young woman (נערה – naʿărâh) was very beautiful, a virgin (בתוּלה – betulah), and no man knew her. She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher, and came back” (Genesis 24:16). But when Eliezer recounts his story to Rebekah's father (Bethuel), he refers to Rebekah as a young woman (עלמה – al-mah), a sexually mature woman of ideal working age, because he was unaware of her true sexual condition. “And on that day I came to the well and said, ‘Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you will now make my way prosperous! I am here by the spring; that the young woman (עלמה , al-mah) who comes to draw water, to whom I say, “Please give me a little water from your jar to drink” (Genesis 24:42-43). Note that here the Hebrew word for “young woman” is now (עלמה , al-mah), that is, a young woman who may or may not necessarily be a virgin.

Therefore, it is essential that we understand the difference between these two words if we want to grasp the meaning of the supposed "virgin birth" of Yeshua (Jesus). The key verse that most

Christians use for this interpretation is a message from Jehovah, transmitted by Isaiah to Ahaz, king of Judah: “Therefore my Lord (Jehovah) will give you a sign: Behold, the young woman (העלמה - al-mah', and not bethulah) will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey, so that he may know how to reject evil and choose good. For before the man knows how to reject evil and choose good, the land you fear will be abandoned by its two kings” (Isaiah 7:14-16). Again the word appears in Isaiah: “For as a young man marries a virgin (בתולה - bethulah) , so your sons will marry you” (Isaiah 62:5). Therefore, note that when one wishes to refer to a young woman in general, the Hebrew words are העלמה- a al-mah or נערה – naʿărâh, but when one wishes to specify that mulheer is a virgin, the word is (בתולה- bethulah .

Leviticus 21:14 specifies different types of women: “The widow (אלמנה- almânâh), the divorced woman (גָּרַשׁ-gârash), the defiled woman (חָלַל֙ châlâl) or the prostitute (זָנָה zânâh), he shall not marry a virgin (בְּתוּלָה - bethulah) of his people.” In the Septuagint, bethulah is translated as παρθένος – parthenose, and in the Vulgate as puella (girl, young woman, young woman, can also mean a young female dog), which does not necessarily have to be a virgin (virgo). Deuteronomy 22:15-17 is even more specific: The young woman’s father and mother (נַעֲרָה – naʿărâh) will then present the proof of the young woman’s virginity (בתולים- bethuliym) to the elders of the city, at the gate. The young woman’s father (נַעֲרָה – naʿărâh) will say to the elders: “I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he does not like her, and now he has invented accusations against her, saying: ‘I have not found proof of your daughter’s virginity (בתולים- bethuliym).’ But here is the proof of my daughter’s virginity.” In the Septuagint, the translation of נַעֲרָה – naʿărâh (young woman) is the Greek word παῖς – pais, which is more commonly used in the sense of “child”, and virginity (ולים – bethuliym) is translated by παρθένια – parthenia (virginity), [6] a polysemous cognate word παρθένος – parthenos (girl, young woman, young woman or virgin).

In Exodus 2:08: “And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Go.’ So the young woman (עַלְמָה - 'almâh) went and called the child’s mother.” In this verse, the Hebrew word almah is translated into Greek as νεᾶνις – neanis (young woman, maiden) and into Latin as puella (young woman, girl, young girl). In Exodus 22:16: “If a man seduces a virgin (bethulah) who is not betrothed, and lies with her, then he shall pay her the dowry and take her as his wife.” The Hebrew word bethulah is translated into Greek as παρθένος – parthenose and into Latin as virgo. In Proverbs 30:19, when dealing with the treatment of one thing by another, the last phrase “…and the manner of a man with a young woman (almah)” was confusingly translated into Greek and Latin. The word almah is translated into Greek as νεότητι – neoteti, which is the dative of νεότης – neotes (youth), therefore neoteti means “for youth”. The Latin translation also made a mistake and translated this last phrase as “et viam viri in adolescentia”, and the manner of a man in adolescence.

Let us now examine the Greek and Latin words translated as virgin in the Canonical Gospels, whose clearest mentions appear in Luke 1:27: “In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin [7] (παρθένος – parthenos) pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.” The virgin’s name (παρθένος – parthenos) was Mary (Luke 1:27). In the Vulgate, in both passages, the Latin translation for “parthenos” is “virgo” (virgin). The following verse, 1:34, seeks to specify that παρθένος – parthenos refers to virginity: Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have never been a man?” This last phrase, “if I have never known a man,” translated from the Greek ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω, has a controversial meaning and is therefore translated differently in current Bibles. In the Vulgate, the translation is “quoniam.” virum non cognosco? (since I don't know a man?) Whereas, some modern translations are more explanatory: "if I have never had sexual relations with a man?"

In Matthew 1:23: “Behold, the virgin (παρθένος – parthenos) shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name

Immanuel," in the Vulgate the translation is virgo (virgin). In Matthew 25:01: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten virgins took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom," in the Vulgate the translation is decem virginibus (ten virgins). In 25:07: "Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps." In 25:11: "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!'" in the Vulgate the translation is virgines (virgins). In Acts 21:09: "He had four unmarried daughters." παρθένοι – tugatéres téssares parthénoi) who had the gift of prophecy", the Latin translation in the Vulgate is: quatuor filiæ virgines – four virgin daughters. Thus, in all these passages, contemporary translators are divided on whether to translate παρθένοι – parthénoi as "young women" or as "virgins".

Finally, the meaning of παρθένος – parthenos is ambiguous. Unlike its biblical meaning, parthenos appears in the sense of "unmarried women who are not virgins" in Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon* , which mentions some passages in Greek works where this meaning appears. If this is the case, the Greek term does not specify whether the woman is a young woman or a virgin, or both. Since the meaning of parthenos can be that of a young woman or a virgin. Some researchers, especially Jewish authors, believe that it is not possible to be certain whether, in the New Testament, Mary is mentioned as a young woman (who may not be a virgin) or a virgin who is also young, since both meanings apply to the word παρθένος – parthenos. However, the passage Luke 1:34: "How can this be, since I have never known a man?" Therefore, it specifies that parthenos, in verse I.27, refers to Mary being a virgin at the time of conception.

I.08 . The Classification of Versions

Mentions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in texts outside the canonical gospels can be divided as follows:

1) Praiseworthy mentions: in the apocryphal gospels – Mary is a virgin and the mother of the son of God.

2) Moderately complimentary mentions: in Islamic scriptures: Quran and Hadiths – Mary is pure, but she is not the mother of the Son of God, as Jesus is only a prophet of Allah.
3) The derogatory mentions: in the Talmud and in the Sepher Toledoth Yeshu collection, where Mary is not a virgin, but rather an adulterous mother, therefore Jesus is a bastard son.

Therefore, the following study will follow this order of treatment, beginning with the most laudatory approaches, then the moderate approaches, and finally the derogatory approaches. Also, in the apocrypha and the Sefer Toledoth Yeshu collection, the episodes will be arranged in order of composition, that is, the oldest first and the later ones next, as well as in order of length, that is, the shortest first and the longest later, so that the reader may perceive how much the accounts of the same episodes grew in length and detail as new compositions emerged.

II. The Praiseworthy Versions

II.01. The Birth of Mary

In the Protoevangelium of James 8 5.02
Six months passed for Hannah; and in the seventh month she gave birth. She asked the midwife, “What is it?” The midwife answered, “A girl.” Then Hannah said, “My soul rejoices today.” And she laid the child down. When the days were fulfilled, Hannah washed away the blood of her impurity, gave her breast to the girl, and named her Mary.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 4
After these events, at the end of her nine months of pregnancy, Anne gave birth to a daughter, whom she named Mary.

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 5

Thus, Anne conceived and gave birth to a daughter, and, as the angel had commanded, her parents named her Mary.
[Note: The story of Anne, Mary's mother, as well as that of Mary's birth, is entirely omitted from the Canonical Gospels. The Quran is also silent on the matter. As we will show later, the accounts of Mary are much more extensive in the Apocrypha than in the Canonical Gospels. Therefore, it is impossible to decide on the historicity of the events narrated in the Apocrypha, that is, whether the Apocrypha added other myths about Mary, or whether the Canonical Gospels are the ones that are silent. Not only in the above case, but historians suggest that the additions in the Apocryphal Gospels occurred to fill the narrative gaps in the Canonical Gospels, since they were composed later. Note that, in the Protoevangelion of James, Anne, Mary's mother, gave birth "in the seventh month," while in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, she gave birth "when the nine months of gestation were completed."]

II.02. Maria at Six Months Old

In the Protoevangelium of James 6.01
Day after day, the girl grew and became strong; when she was six months old, her mother put her down to see if she could stand up. And she took seven steps and reached her mother's lap. Then her mother took her in her lap and said, 'As surely as the Lord my God lives, you will not walk on this earth again until I take you to the temple of the Lord.' And she made a sanctuary in her upper room and did not allow anything unclean or impure to pass through it. And she called the pure daughters of the Hebrews, and they entertained her.
[Note: Another event not found in the Canonical Gospels. Observe the degree of zeal of Mary's mother: "...you will not walk on the earth again until I take you to the temple of the Lord."]

II.03. Mary's First Birthday

In the Protoevangelium of James 6.02
On the child's first birthday, Joachim gave a great banquet and invited the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and all the people of Israel. Joachim brought the child to the priests, and they blessed him, saying, “O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name that will be eternally renowned among all generations.” And all the people said, “So be it, so be it, Amen.” Then they brought her to the chief priests, and they blessed her, saying, “O God of the heavenly heights, look upon this child and bless her with a supreme, unsurpassable blessing.” And his mother took her to the sanctuary of her chamber and nursed her. And Hannah sang this hymn to the Lord God: “I will sing a hymn to the Lord my God, for he has visited me and removed from me the reproach of my enemies. And the Lord has given me the fruit of his righteousness, singular and multifaceted before him.” Who will tell the son of Reuben that Hannah is nursing him? And she laid her down to rest in the upper room of her sanctuary, and went out and served them. When the feast was over, they came down joyful and glorifying the God of Israel.
[Note: Joachim is Mary's father. The mention of an angel visiting her occurs because Anne was barren and, after her husband Joachim's pleas, an angel appeared announcing that Anne would become pregnant. This episode is also absent from the Canonical Gospels. The phrase that says Joachim invited "...all the people of Israel" is obviously a hyperbole for rhetorical effect, since, literally, inviting so many people is an impossible task.].

II.04. The Presentation of Mary in the Temple

In the Protoevangelium of James 7
Months passed and the child grew. When she turned two, Joachim said, “Let us take her to the Temple of the Lord, so that we may fulfil the promise we made, before the Lord sends us some evil and our offering becomes unacceptable”. And Anne replied, “Let us wait until

the third year, so that the child no longer desires her father and mother." And Joachim said, "Let us wait." And when the girl turned three, Joachim said, "Call the pure daughters of the Hebrews, and let each one take a torch and light it, so that the girl may not stray and her heart may not be tempted to turn away from the Temple of the Lord." And they did so until they went up to the Temple of the Lord. And the priest took her, kissed her, and blessed her, saying, "The Lord has made your name great among all generations." And he set her on the third step of the altar, and the Lord God blessed her, and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.
[Note: "…before the Lord sends us any evil," observe how superstitious ancient societies were. See the pleonasm in the final phrase; "…and she danced with her feet," as well as the hyperbole "and all the house of Israel loved her." Since the apocryphal texts did not undergo the refined revisions of the canonical texts, we can observe the harshness of their language when we compare the two collections.]

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 4-5
And when Mary was three years old, Joachim and his wife Anne went together to the Temple of the Lord to offer sacrifices to God, and they placed the child, named Mary, in the community of virgins, where they remained day and night praising God. And when they placed her before the doors of the Temple, she climbed the fifteen steps so quickly that she did not look back; nor, as is the custom of children, did she look for her parents. When her parents and the priests of the Temple saw this, they were amazed. Then Anne, filled with the Holy Spirit, said before them all: "The Lord Almighty, God of Hosts, remembering his word, has visited his people with a good and holy visitation, to humble the hearts of the Gentiles who rose up against us and to convert them to himself. He has opened his ears to our prayers and has taken away from us the exultation of all our enemies." The barren woman became a mother and gave birth to joy and gladness for Israel. These are the gifts I brought to offer to my

Lord, and my enemies could not stop me. For God turned their hearts to me and granted me eternal joy.
[Note: The phrase "The barren woman became a mother and gave birth to joy and gladness for Israel" appears because, in Jewish culture, a barren woman is stigmatised by society, as she is incapable of bearing a child, something like a curse. This is very different from other religions, such as the ascetic stage (samnyasi) in Hinduism, the monks and nuns of Buddhism, especially the Theravāda tradition, and monastic Christianity, where there is a vow of celibacy, the practice of which is therefore a virtue, not a curse; this is why there are no monks and nuns in Judaism.]

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 6
After three years, when the breastfeeding period came to an end, they took the Virgin with offerings to the Temple of the Lord. There were fifteen steps around the Temple, corresponding to the fifteen gradual Psalms. As the Temple was built on a mountain, the altar of burnt offerings outside could only be reached by the steps. They placed the Virgin on the first of these steps. According to custom, they removed their travelling clothes. While putting on clean, new clothes, the Virgin climbed step by step, without anyone's help, in such a way that one could believe she was already an adult. In the Virgin's childhood, the Lord had already performed a great feat and demonstrated the greatness she would achieve by the sign of this miracle. After celebrating the sacrifice according to the custom of the Law and making their vow, they left the Virgin inside the Temple with the other virgins who were raised there.
[Note: Both here and in subsequent quotations, observe that as time progresses, the narratives of the episodes become more extensive, since the gospels here are positioned in chronological order, that is, from oldest to latest. Therefore, given this, we do not know if the oldest were silent, or if the later ones added new details omitted in the earlier ones; most likely, in both cases, they are accounts drawn from oral tradition. The Protoevangelium of James is pointed out by

many scholars as the source for the composition of the later apocryphal gospels about the life of Mary.]

II.05. Mary in the Temple

In the Protoevangelium of James 8.01
And her parents returned, amazed, praising the Lord God because the girl had not turned back. And Mary was in the Temple of the Lord, nourished like a dove and fed by the hand of an angel. (1).

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 6-7
They themselves returned home. As she grew, the Virgin of the Lord progressed in virtue day by day. And this is because, in the words of the Psalmist, "when her parents forsake her, God takes her in." Every day she was assisted by angels, every day she enjoyed the divine vision, which preserved her from all evil and granted her abundant goodness.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 6-7
Mary was admired by all the people of Israel; and when she was three years old, she walked with such mature steps, spoke with such perfection, and devoted herself with such diligence to the praises of God, that everyone marvelled and was amazed at her; and she was not considered a small child, but as an adult. She was so constant in prayer, and her appearance was so beautiful and glorious, that almost no one could look upon her face. And she constantly occupied herself with her weaving work, so that, at her tender age, she could do everything that older women could not do. And this was the order she had established for herself: from morning until the third hour, she remained in prayer; from the third to the ninth, she devoted herself to weaving; and from the ninth, she returned to prayer. She did not withdraw from prayer until the angel of the Lord appeared to her, from whose hand she used to receive food; and thus she became ever more perfect in the work of God. So, when the older

virgins rested from praising God, she did not rest at all; so that, in praises and vigils to God, no one was found before her, no one more instructed in the wisdom of God's law, more humble in her piety, more elegant in her singing, more perfect in every virtue. She was, in a tender way, firm, unwavering, immutable, and progressed daily toward perfection. No one saw her angry, nor heard her speak evil. All her speech was so full of grace that it was recognised that God was on her tongue. She was always engaged in prayer and the study of the law, and feared not to sin with any word of hers in relation to her companions. Moreover, she feared that, in her laughter or in the sound of her beautiful voice, she might commit some fault, or that, in her joy, she might show some injustice or arrogance toward any of her equals. She blessed God without ceasing, and even if, in her greeting, she failed to praise God, if someone greeted her, she would respond with the greeting: “Thanks be to God.” And from her arose the custom of men saying, “Thanks be to God” when greeting one another. She ate only the food she received daily from the angel’s hand; but the food she obtained from the priests she distributed to the poor. The angels of God were frequently seen conversing with her, and they diligently obeyed her. If anyone who was sick touched her, they would immediately return home healed. Then Abiathar the priest offered numerous gifts to the chief priests so that he might obtain her as a wife for his son. But Mary prevented them, saying, “It is not possible that I know a man, nor that a man knows me.” For all the priests and all her relatives said to her, “God is worshipped in children and revered in offspring, as has always been the case among the children of Israel.” But Mary answered and said to them, “God is worshipped first in chastity. For before Abel there was no righteous person among men; and he, with his offerings, pleased God. And he was mercilessly killed by the one who displeased him. Therefore, he received two crowns: the crown of offering and the crown of virginity, because there was no impurity in his flesh. Elijah also, when he was in the flesh, was taken up in the flesh, because he kept his flesh spotless. Now, I, from my childhood in the temple of

God, have learned that virginity can be sufficiently precious to God. And so, because I can offer what is precious to God, I have resolved in my heart not to know any man.
[Note: While Mary's mother, Anne, was stigmatised for not having offspring, Mary, in contrast, is praised here for her virginity and choice of a celibate life; moreover, she was "admired by all in Israel." Such an extensive and detailed passage, concerning just one episode, far more extensive than its counterparts, leads us to question the source of this information, since there are no written historical records, nor eyewitnesses, given that the texts were composed centuries after the events. It could only have been interpolations created by oral traditions. "Mary was admired by all the people of Israel" is another exaggeration. If it were true, there would be no suspicions about the legitimacy of Jesus in the Canonical Gospels, nor the derogatory versions disseminated by Jews and mentioned by the first Christian heresiologists (Justin Martyr, Origen, etc.).]

In the Questions (Gospel?) of Bartholomew II.15-9
15. When I was dwelling in the Temple of God and receiving my food from the hand of an angel, one day someone appeared to me in the form of an angel; but his face was indescribable, and in his hand there was neither bread nor cup, like the angel who visited me before. 16. And immediately the veil of the Temple was torn, and there was a violent earthquake, and I fell to the ground, for I could not bear to see him. 17. But he took me by the hand and lifted me up. And I looked up to heaven; and a cloud of demons fell upon my face and sprinkled me from head to foot, and he wiped me with his cloak. 18. Then he said to me: Hail, you who are highly favoured, chosen vehicle! And then he touched the right side of his garment, and an extremely large loaf of bread came out, and he placed it on the altar of the Temple, and first ate of it and then served me also. 19. And again, he touched his garment on the left side, and I looked and saw a cup full of wine. And he placed it on the altar of the

Temple, and first he himself drank from it and also served me. And I looked and saw that the bread had not diminished and the cup was as full as before.

[Note: Observe that in this last passage, unlike the previous ones, it is Mary who narrates the episode. Regarding this text, *The Questions of Bartholomew*, researchers are still not certain whether or not it is the same one cited as *the Gospel of Bartholomew* by Jerome (4th century CE). The texts and redactions of the surviving recensions in Greek, Latin, and Slavonic diverge considerably, which is why translators and editors publish them in parallel (see: SCHNEEMELCHER, 2003: vol. I, 540-51 and JAMES, 1969: 167-81). Some collections of apocrypha omit them due to textual confusion: OTERO, 1956; ELLIOTT, 2005 and EHRMAN, 2011. The differences can vary to the point that, in two versions (Greek and Latin) of the work, the dialogue with Jesus takes place after his resurrection, while the Slavic recension places the dialogue during Jesus' ministry, before his death.

The miracles described above are further examples, among many others, of how the Apocryphal Gospels are more mythological than the Canonical Gospels. Subsisting only on bread and wine, even if given by an angel, is biologically malnourished, especially during a young person's growth phase. We know of no one who has managed to remain healthy on such a nutrient-deficient diet; survival is only possible in mythological accounts, where such insufficient nutrition is found. Subsisting only on bread and wine is almost like fasting; similarly, daily consumption of so much wine during childhood and adolescence is not nutritionally advisable.]

II.06. Mary at the Age of Twelve

In the Protoevangelium of James 8.02-3

When she turned twelve, a council of the priests gathered and said, “Behold, Mary is twelve years old in the temple of the Lord. What shall we do with her, so that she does not profane the temple of the

Lord?" They said to the high priest, "You are standing by the altar of the Lord; go into the sanctuary and pray for her, and we will do whatever the Lord tells you." Then the high priest put on the robe with the twelve bells, went into the Holy of Holies, and prayed for her. And behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Zechariah, Zechariah, go out and gather the widows of the people; and to whomever the Lord gives a sign, she shall be his wife." And the heralds went out throughout all the region of Judea; at the sound of the trumpet of the Lord, all came running.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 8
When she was twelve years old, the Pharisees said it was customary for no woman of that age to remain in the Temple of God. So they devised a plan to send a herald throughout all the tribes of Israel, so that on the third day everyone would gather in the Temple of the Lord. And when all the people had gathered, Abiathar, the high priest, called out and stood on a higher step, so that he could be seen and heard by all the people; and when a great silence fell, he said: "Listen to me, children of Israel, and receive my words into your ears. Since this Temple was built by Solomon, there have always been virgins in it, daughters of kings and daughters of prophets, and of high priests and priests; and they were great and worthy of admiration. But when they reached the appropriate age, they were given in marriage and followed the example of their mothers, being preached to God. But a new order of life was discovered only by Mary, who promises that she will remain a virgin for God." Therefore, it seems to me that, through our investigation and God's answer, we should seek to whom it should be entrusted. Then, these words were well received by the whole synagogue. And the priests cast one kind upon the twelve tribes, and one kind fell upon the tribe of Judah. And the priest said, 'Tomorrow, let everyone who is unmarried come and bring his staff in his hand.'

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 7

She reached the age of fourteen in such a way that only the wicked could find something to reproach her for; the good people who knew her considered her life and conduct worthy of admiration. Then, the High Priest publicly ordered all the virgins who were being taught in the Temple and who had already completed their youth to return to their homes to prepare for marriage, according to the customs of the nation and their maturity. While the others calmly obeyed this order, only Mary, the Virgin of the Lord, replied that she could not do so because her parents had consecrated her to the service of the Lord and, moreover, as she herself had promised her virginity to the Lord, she could not violate this vow by uniting herself to a man. The High Priest was distressed, for he knew that one could not violate a promise contrary to the Scriptures which said: “Make vows and fulfil them,” and because he did not dare to introduce a foreign custom into the nation. Therefore, he stipulated that, at the approaching feast, all the illustrious citizens of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas should be present so that he could learn from their counsel what should be done in such a controversial case. This happened, and all agreed that the Lord should be consulted on the matter. While the people prostrated themselves in prayer, the High Priest inquired according to custom. Without delay, a voice from the oracle and the place of propitiation was heard by all, saying that they should follow the prophet Isaiah to learn to whom the Virgin should be entrusted and betrothed. Isaiah had said: “And there shall spring forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a Branch shall bear fruit out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and of knowledge, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of understanding and of piety, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill him.” Thus, according to this prophecy, all the members of David's household and family, of marriageable age, and the unmarried, brought their staffs to the altar. And if a small staff blossomed after the offering, and if the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon its tip, its owner would be the one to whom the Virgin would be entrusted and given in marriage.

In the Story of Joseph the Carpenter 3 and 4
3 (1) While my father Joseph remained a widower, my mother Mary, good and blessed in all things, dwelt in the temple and served there in purity, having grown up to the age of twelve: she spent three years in her parents' house and nine years in the temple of the Lord. (2) Then the priests, seeing the virgin living reverently and dwelling in the fear of the Lord, spoke to one another, saying: 'Let us find a good man and betroth her to him until the time of marriage, so that we do not impose on her the custom of women in the temple and fall into great sin.'
Immediately they summoned the tribe of Judah and chose twelve people from it, corresponding to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The lot fell on good old Joseph, my father according to the flesh. Then the priests spoke and said to my blessed virgin mother: 'Go with Joseph and obey him until the time of marriage arrives.' My father Joseph took Mary, my mother, into his home. She found the boy James in the sorrow of the orphanage and began to raise him; therefore, she was called Mary of James. After Joseph took her into his home, he left to work as a carpenter. Mary, my mother, spent two years in his house until the appointed time.
[Note: Observe that, in this last quote, the Story of Joseph the Carpenter, it is Jesus himself who narrates the story of his mother, something like an autobiography. Imagine how surprised, or even worse, horrified a modern Christian would be to learn that an autobiography of Jesus existed! It's impressive how far the imagination of the early Christians reached in creating myths; now imagine the confusion that Christianity was in at the beginning.]

II.07. Mary, the Weaver of the Temple Veil

In the Protoevangelium of James 10
Now a council of priests said, “Let us make a veil for the Temple of the Lord.” And the priest said, “Call to me pure virgins from the tribe

of David.” The officials went out and searched, and found seven virgins. Then the priest remembered the girl Mary, who was of the tribe of David and was pure before God. And the officials went to get her. Then they brought them to the Temple of the Lord, and the priest said, “Cast lots to see who will weave the gold, the jasmine, the linen, the silk, the blue, the crimson, and the pure purple.” The pure purple and the crimson fell by lot to Mary. And she took them and returned home. At that time Zechariah became mute, and Samuel took his place until Zechariah could speak again. Mary took the crimson and spun it.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 8
Then Joseph received Mary, along with the other five virgins who were with her in Joseph's house. These virgins were Rebekah, Zipporah, Susanna, Abigie, and Zael; to these the high priest gave silk, blue, fine linen, scarlet, purple, and fine linen. For they cast lots among themselves for what each virgin would make, and the purple, for the veil of the Temple of the Lord, fell to Mary's lot. And when she received it, those virgins said to her, “Since you are the last, the most humble, and the youngest of all, you have deserved to receive and obtain the purple.” And saying this, as if in a tone of affront, they began to call her queen of virgins. While they were doing this, the angel of the Lord appeared in their midst and said, “These words were not spoken in vain, but prophesied as a most certain prophecy.” Frightened by the presence of the angel and his words, they prayed, asking forgiveness and that she would pray for them.

II.08. An Angel Sent to Mary

In Luke 1:26-27.
In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 9:1-2
On the second day, while Mary was at the well to fill her pitcher, the angel of the Lord appeared to her, saying: “Blessed are you, Mary, for in your womb you have prepared a dwelling place for the Lord. For behold, the light of heaven will come and dwell in you, and through you it will shine upon the whole world. (01)
Again, on the third day, while she was working with her fingers on the purple, a young man of ineffable beauty entered. When she saw him, Mary was afraid and trembled. (02)

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.01
At that moment, as soon as she arrived in Galilee, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to tell her about the conception of the Lord and to explain how and in what way this would happen. Upon entering her house, he filled the room where she was with an immense light.
[Note: Notice that the accounts in the apocrypha are always more extensive and detailed than the canonical account.]

In the Quran 19.17, 3.42 and 66.12
Then We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a perfect man (19:17).
[Note: The expression “Our Spirit” (Ruhana) derives from Rūh, which literally means: breath of life, soul, spirit. It appears in some translations of the Quran as “angel Gabriel,” since in other passages this Spirit is identified with the angel Jibril, as Rūh is a special name for the angel Jibril, sometimes called al-Rūh, “the Spirit” (ALI, 2003: vol. II, 954n9). Note the similarity of the Arabic word Rūh (spirit, soul) with the Hebrew word Ruach (soul).]
And when the angels said, “O Mary! Surely God has chosen you, purified you, and elected you above all the women of the world” (3.42).
“… We breathed into her (Mary) our Spirit…” (66.12).

In the Questions (Gospel?) of Bartholomew II.20-1

20. Then he (the angel) said, “In three years I will send my word, and you will conceive my son, and through him the whole world will be saved. But you will bring salvation to the world. Peace be with you, favoured one, and my peace will be with you forever.” 21. And having said this, he disappeared from my sight, and the Temple was as before.
[Note: While in Luke 1:12-17 Mary is mentioned twice as a virgin, in all the above passages from the apocrypha she is not mentioned as a virgin. In the previous passage, the angel states that the child will be hers.]

In Epistle of the Apostles 14.59-63
“At that time, I appeared in the form of the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary and spoke with her, and her heart received me, she believed in me and laughed, and I, the Word, entered into her and became flesh, and I myself was a servant to myself, and in the likeness of an angel, just as he (Gabriel) did, I will do, and after that, I will go to my Father.”
[Note: In the text immediately above, Mary is cited as a virgin. The discrepancies in early Christian texts are so numerous that it is possible to find versions of Mary's conception, such as the apocryphal text above, known as *Epistula Apostolorum* (Epistle of the Apostles), 14.59-63, probably composed in the mid-2nd century CE, a dialogue between the apostles and Jesus after his resurrection, in which, unlike most versions, it is Jesus himself who assumes the form of the angel Gabriel and enters the womb of his mother Mary. Thus, the phrase: “I appeared in the form of the archangel Gabriel to the virgin Mary and spoke with her, and her heart received me, she believed in me and laughed, and I, the Word, entered into her and became flesh” leads the reader to understand it as an act of “divine incest.” In Greek mythology, the practice of incest is very common.]

Furthermore, note the crude nature of the writing in this passage. This apocryphal text, a major forgery in early Christianity,

perhaps around 160 CE, is a letter from the 12 apostles to all Christian churches of the time, with clear ideological and sectarian objectives. It was most likely composed in Greek, but the Greek manuscript has not been preserved; therefore, we only have two more complete translations: in Ethiopian (still used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) and in Coptic (missing the first six chapters). For details, see SCHNEEMELCHER, 2003: vol. I, 252ff.]

II.09. The Greeting

In Luke 1:28
And he (the angel) approached her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you!'

In the Protoevangelium of James 11.01
And she took her pitcher and went out to draw water; and behold, a voice said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.”

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 9:02
And he (the angel) said to her: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.01
…and greeted her with great joy, saying: “Hail Mary, Virgin so pleasing to the Lord, Virgin full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among all women and blessed among all men who have ever been born.”

II.10. The Mary’s Reaction

In Luke 1:29

But she was very disturbed by the phrase and wondered what kind of greeting that could be.

In the Protoevangelium of James 11.01
And she looked to the right and to the left to see where that voice was coming from. And, trembling, she went home, put down the jar, picked up the purple cloth, sat on her stool, and unwound the thread.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 9:02
Upon hearing those words, she trembled and became afraid.

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.02
The Virgin, who already knew the faces of angels well and was familiar with celestial light, was not frightened by the sight of the angel nor was she overwhelmed by the intensity of the light. But she was troubled by his own words and began to wonder what that unusual greeting meant, what it contained, and to what purpose it would lead her.
[Note: In the passage above, unlike the others, Mary was not frightened by the angel's presence.]

In the Quran 19.18
She said, “In truth, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you (so leave me alone), if you are a God-fearing person,”
[Note: Notice the differences in the accounts, both when comparing the canonical text with the apocryphal texts, as well as among the apocryphal texts themselves, and also when compared to the Quran. Invariably, the apocryphal texts are more extensive, so that, initially, for the orthodox Christians of the time, the apocryphal texts were interpolations, while for the Christian currents (Arians, Nestorians, Gnostics, Ebionites, etc.) rejected in the early councils, the canonical gospels were omissions and censorship.]
The phrase in parentheses, "then leave me alone," in the Quran, does not appear in the Arabic text; it is an addition made by

translators to make the phrase "if you are God-fearing" more meaningful.

II.11. The Annunciation

In Luke 1:30-33
And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

In the Protoevangelium of James 11.02
And behold, an angel of the Lord appeared before her and said, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with the Lord of all things, and you will conceive by his word.”

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 9:02
Then the angel of the Lord added: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a King who will fill not only the earth but also the heavens, and he will reign from generation to generation.

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.02-3
The angel, inspired by God, answered her thought, saying: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for this greeting does not conceal anything contrary to your chastity. Indeed, you have found favour with God. Because you have chosen chastity and virginity, you will conceive without sin and give birth to a son. He will be great, for he will reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth, and he will be called the Son of the Most High, for he who is born in humility on Earth reigns with the Father in greatness. And the Lord God will give him

the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for centuries, and his kingdom will have no end."

In the Quran 19.19; 3.43, 45 and 46
He said, "I am only a messenger from your Lord, sent to bless you with a pure son." (19.19)
O Mary! "Be devoted to your Lord, prostrate yourself (in prayer) and bow down with those who bow down" (3.43).
And when the angels said, "O Mary! Allah gives you good tidings of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary; honoured in this world and the Hereafter, and he will be one of the closest to Allah" (3.45).
[Note: Observe that in the passage above, Quran 3:45, unlike the others, it is not just one angel who appears to Mary, but more than one (al-malaikatu – angels), whereas in the passage from Quran 19:19 it is only one angel who speaks to Mary, "I am only a messenger from your Lord…" (qala innama ana rasulu Rabbaki…).]
"He will speak to the people while they are still in the cradle, and he will speak when he is an adult, and he will be one of the virtuous ones" (3.46).
[Note: Jesus, as a newborn, spoke in his cradle in Quran 19:30-3, one of Jesus' most comical miracles. For a collection of Jesus' comical miracles, see: BOTELHO, 2012.]

II.12. Mary's Reaction to the Annunciation

In Luke 1:34
And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have never known a man?"

In the Protoevangelium of James 11.02
Hearing this, she reflected and said, "Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God, and give birth as all women give birth?"

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.04
To the angel's words, the Virgin (Virgo) responded, not out of disbelief, but out of a desire to know how the birth would occur, saying: “How can this happen? I myself have not known any man because of my vow. How can I conceive according to human will or give birth to a child without male semen?”

In the Quran 3.47 and 19.20
She (Mary) said: “My Lord! How can I have a child when no man has ever touched me?” An angel replied: “So it will be. Allah creates what He wills. When He decrees something, He simply says: 'Be!' And so it is!” (3.47).
She said, “How can I have a child if no man has ever touched me, and if I am not unclean?” (19.20).

II.13. The Angel's Explanation

In Luke 1:35-7
And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

In the Protoevangelium of James 11.03
And the angel of the Lord said, “No, Mary, for the power of the Lord will overshadow you; therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of the Most High, and you shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.04
The angel answered, “Do not think that you will conceive like a human being. Rather, you will conceive like a virgin, without union

with a man; like a virgin you will give birth and nurse. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will protect you from all the flames of passion. Therefore, the one to be born of you will be called holy, since he was conceived and born without sin; he will be called the Son of God."

In the Quran 19.21
He (the angel) replied: "So be it! Your Lord says: 'It is easy for Me. And so We will make him a sign for humanity and a mercy on Our part.' It is a matter already decreed."

II.14. Mary's Reaction to the Explanation

In Luke 1:38
And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

In the Protoevangelium of James 11.03
And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord before him; let it be done to me according to your word.'

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 9.04
Then Mary, with her hands outstretched and her eyes turned toward heaven, said: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. I am unworthy to be called a mother. I will do according to your will."

In the Quran 19.22
Then she conceived him and withdrew with him (the angel) to a distant place.
[Note: Observe that this account contrasts with all the others. That is, the other narratives mention that the angel departed from her, but not that she accompanied him to a distant place.]

II.15. Mary's Journey to Elizabeth

In Luke 1:39-40
In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

In the Protoevangelium of James 12.02
And Mary, full of joy, went to her relative Elizabeth and knocked on the door.

II.16. Elizabeth Greets and Blesses Mary

In Luke 1:41-45
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me, that I should conceive a favour to God, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

In the Protoevangelium of James 12.02
Upon hearing this, Elizabeth tore down her scarlet veil, ran to the door, opened it, and seeing Mary, she blessed her, saying, “How is it that the mother of my Lord has come to visit me? For behold, what is in me rejoices and blesses you!”

II.17. Mary's Reaction

In Luke 1:46-55
And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the humble estate

of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

In the Protoevangelium of James 12.02
But Mary forgot the mysteries that the archangel Gabriel had revealed to her, sighed toward heaven and said: "Who am I, Lord, that all generations on earth should consider me blessed?"

II.18. Mary Stays with Elizabeth for Three Months

In Luke 1:56
And Mary stayed with her for about three months, and then returned to her home.

In the Protoevangelium of James 12.03
And she stayed with Isabel for three months.

II.19. The Explanation of Mary's Pregnancy to Joseph

In Matthew 1:18
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

In the Protoevangelium of James 12.03 – 13.01
Day after day, her belly grew, and Mary, afraid, retreated to her house and hid herself from the children of Israel. Mary was sixteen years old when all these mysterious things happened. When she

was six months pregnant, Joseph came out of his construction site, entered the house, and found her pregnant.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 10:1
While all this was happening, Joseph was busy with his work, building a house by the sea in Capernaum, for he was a carpenter. And after nine months, he returned home and found Mary pregnant.

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 10
Joseph, returning from Judea to Galilee, intended to take the virgin, his betrothed, as his wife. Three months had passed, and the fourth month had just begun since their betrothal. In the meantime, her belly had gradually grown; the child began to be seen and could no longer be hidden from Joseph. Entering openly into the virgin's house, as betrothed couples do, and conversing intimately with her, he realised that she was pregnant.

In the Story of Joseph the Carpenter 5 and 6
In the fourteenth year of her life, I left of my own accord and dwelt within her, I who am Jesus, your life. And when she was three months pregnant, the naive Joseph came from the place where he worked as a carpenter and found my virgin mother pregnant. Disturbed and afraid, he planned to leave her secretly. And because of his sorrow, he neither ate nor drank. But in the middle of the night, behold, Gabriel, the archangel of joy, came to him in a vision by order of my good Father and said to him: 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for what she is about to give birth to is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus; he is the one who will rule all nations with an iron sceptre.' And the angel left him. Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him: he took Mary close to him.
[Note: This text is narrated by Jesus himself, therefore the phrase "and I dwelt in her" refers to the fact that Jesus entered his mother's

womb and dwelt there as a fetus during the gestation period, which reminds us, again, of the case of divine incest.]

II.20. Joseph's Reaction

In Matthew 1:19
And her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and not wanting to bring shame on her, planned to divorce her quietly.

In the Protoevangelium of James 13.01-14.01
And he (Joseph) struck his face, fell to the ground covered with sackcloth, and wept bitterly, saying, 'With what countenance shall I look upon the Lord my God? What prayer shall I offer for this young woman? For I received her as a virgin, coming from the Temple of the Lord my God, and I did not protect her. Who deceived me? Who committed this evil in my house and disobeyed the virgin? Has the story of Adam been repeated in me? For just as Adam was absent at the hour of his prayer, and the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her, so it has happened to me.' Then Joseph arose from the sackcloth, called Mary, and said to her, 'You who are cared for by God, why have you done this and forgotten the Lord your God? Why have you humbled your soul, you who were created in the Holy of Holies and received nourishment from the hand of an angel?' But she wept bitterly, saying, 'I am pure and do not know any man.' And Joseph said to her, “As surely as the Lord my God lives, I don’t know where this idea came from.” And Joseph was very afraid and turned away from her, wondering what he should do with her. And Joseph said, “If I cover up her sin and expose her to the Israelites, I fear that what is in her is the work of angels, and I will be accused of handing over innocent blood to death. What then shall I do with her? I will hide her in secret.” And night fell on him.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 10

Then, being in extreme distress, he trembled and cried out, saying, “O Lord God, receive my spirit, for it is better for me to die than to live any longer.” And the virgins who were with Mary said to him, “Joseph, what are you saying? We know that no one has touched her; we can testify that she is still a virgin and untouched. We have watched over her; she always remains with us in prayer; daily an angel of God speaks with her; daily she receives food from the hand of an angel. We know that it is impossible for there to be any sin in her. But, if you want us to tell you what we suspect, no one except the angel of the Lord has conceived her.” Then Joseph said, “Why do you lead me to believe that an angel of the Lord conceived her? But it is possible that someone impersonated an angel of the Lord and deceived her.” And saying this, he wept and said, “How can I appear before the temple of the Lord or before the priests of God? What shall I do?” And saying this, he thought of fleeing and sending her away.

In the Gospel of the Birth of Mary 10
He began to grow troubled and distressed because he didn't know what to do. He didn't want to denounce her, for he was honourable, nor defame her on suspicion of fornication, for he was devout. He therefore decided to annul the marriage secretly and repudiate her discreetly.

In the Story of Joseph the Carpenter 5
He was utterly perplexed and considered sending her away secretly. But, filled with fear, sadness, and anguish in his heart, he was unable to eat or drink that day.

II.21. Mary's Affliction Regarding Joseph's Imminent Death

In the Story of Joseph the Carpenter 18.03-9
(3) (Jesus said) Then my beloved mother Mary, whose name is sweet in the mouths of all who love me, rose up and said to me with

great sorrow: 'Woe is me, my beloved son! Will Joseph, of good and blessed old age, your beloved and honouput on flesh will not taste death? (5) For death rules over humanity, my blessed mother. (6) Indeed, you too must die like all men. (7) Whether Joseph, my father, or you, my blessed mother, your death is not death, but eternal and uninterrupted life. (8) For I too will die for all, because of the mortal flesh that I put on in you. (9) Now, therefore, my beloved mother, arise and enter into the presence of the blessed elder Joseph, until you know what ordinance will come from on high.

II.22. The Discovery of Mary's Pregnancy

In the Protoevangelium of James 15.01-2
Then Annas the scribe approached him and said, “Joseph, why didn’t you come to our assembly?” Joseph answered, “Because I was tired from the journey and rested on the first day.” Then Annas turned and saw that Mary was pregnant. He ran to the priest and said, “Joseph, of whom you are a witness, has committed a grave transgression.” The high priest asked, “In what way?” He answered, “He disobeyed the virgin whom he received from the Temple of the Lord, consummating his marriage with her secretly, without revealing it to the children of Israel.” The priest asked, “Was it Joseph who did this?” Annas said, “Send officers, and you will find the virgin pregnant.”

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 12:1
Following these events, a widespread rumour spread that Mary was pregnant.

II.23. Joseph and Mary Questioned

In the Protoevangelium of James 15.02-16.03
The officials went and found everything as he had said, and they brought her and Joseph into the courtyard. The priest said, “Mary,

why have you done this? Why have you humbled your soul and forgotten the Lord your God? You were raised in the Holy of Holies, you received food from the hand of an angel, you heard hymns and danced before him. Why have you done this?" But she wept bitterly and said, "As surely as the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know any man." The priest asked Joseph, "Why have you done this?" Joseph answered, "As surely as the Lord my God lives, I am pure as far as she is concerned." And the priest said, "Do not bear false witness, but tell the truth. You consummated your marriage in secret and did not reveal it to the children of Israel, nor did you bow down under the mighty hand so that your descendants might be blessed." And Joseph remained silent. Then the priest said, "Return the virgin you received from the Temple of the Lord." And Joseph began to weep…"

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 12:1
And Joseph was arrested by the Temple guards and taken, along with Mary, to the high priest. The priest, with the other priests, began to rebuke him, saying, "Why did you deceive such a great and glorious virgin, who was fed like a dove in the Temple by the angels of God, and who never desired to see or have relations with any man, being the most excellent scholar of God's law? If you had not violated her, she would still be a virgin." And Joseph swore and declared that he had never touched her.

II.24. Joseph and Mary are Subjected to Ordeal

In the Protoevangelium of James 16.01-2
And the priest said, 'I will give you water to drink for the Lord's sake, and it will make your sins manifest before your eyes.' And the priest took the water, gave it to Joseph, and sent him into the hill country, and he returned healed. And he gave Mary a drink also, and sent her into the hill country, and she returned healed.

[Note: the phrase “water for the Lord’s verification” (ύδωρ της έλέγξεως κυρίου – udor tes elenxeos kuriou) has divergent translations, due to the controversial meaning of the word έλέγξεως – elenxeos (control, test, verification), since it is a rare Greek word, appearing in few dictionaries and glossaries. The verbal form is ελέγχω – elenxo (to test, control, verify). This ordeal may be the same one cited in Numbers 5:11-31, in the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament (Septuagint), however in the latter the Hebrew words (5:18) are mayim (water) mar mârâh (bitter), translated in the Septuagint as ὕδωρ τοῦ ἐλεγμοῦ – udor tou elegmou (water of control), therefore very different from “bitter water”, and in the Latin Vulgate as “aquas amarissimas” (very bitter waters). Translations into contemporary languages diverge considerably: “drinking water of the Lord”, “water of control”, “water of testing”, “water of purification”, etc. To learn more about ordeal, see: BOTELHO, 2016.]

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 12-01-4
Then Abiathar the high priest answered him, “As surely as the Lord lives, I will give you a drink of the water the Lord has come to drink, and immediately your sin will be exposed.”
[Note: In the Latin text of this gospel, the phrase is "aquam potationis Domini" (drinking water of the Lord). Therefore, very different from "bitter water" for the ordeal. The Latin phrase aquam potationis (potable water) is sometimes translated as "drinking water".]
Then a crowd of people, which could not be counted, gathered, and Mary was taken to the Temple. The priests, her relatives, and her parents wept and said to Mary, “Confess your sin to the priests, you who were like a dove in the Temple of God and received food from the hands of an angel.” Again, Joseph was called to the altar, and they gave him the water of the Lord to drink. When someone who had lied drank of this water and circled the altar seven times, God showed him a sign on his face. When Joseph, therefore, drank of this water safely and circled the altar seven times, no sign of sin

appeared on him. Then all the priests, the officials, and the people justified him, saying, “Blessed are you, for no accusation was found against you.” They called Mary and said, “And what excuse do you have? Can there be a greater sign than your pregnancy to betray you?” Since Joseph is innocent, we only ask that you confess who deceived you. For it is better that her confession betray her than that God’s wrath mark her face and expose her in the midst of the people. Then Mary said, firmly and without trembling: “O Lord God, King over all, who knows all secrets, if there is any impurity in me, or any sin, or any evil desire, or impurity, expose me before all the people and make me an example of punishment for all.” Having said this, she went up boldly to the altar of the Lord and drank the water and walked around the altar seven times, and no blemish was found on her. When all the people were extremely amazed, seeing that she was pregnant and that no sign had appeared on her face, they began to discuss and give different opinions: some said that she was holy and immaculate, others that she was wicked and rebellious. Then Mary, seeing that there was still suspicion among the people and that she did not seem entirely innocent to them, cried out in a loud voice in the hearing of them all: “As surely as the Lord Adonai, the Lord of Hosts, lives, before whom I stand, I have not known any man; but I am known by Him to whom I have been consecrated since my childhood. And this vow that I made to my God from my childhood, that I would remain blameless in Him who created me, and I hope that so I will live only for Him and only for Him will I serve; and in Him, as long as I live, I will remain blameless.”

[Note: Observe the irrationality and the superstition of judgment by water ordeal, a stupid justice procedure where the decision was left to chance, imagining that God would interfere in the judgment. This practice was widely used by religions in the past, allowing us to gauge the high degree of judicial ignorance of ancient religious authorities. In this water ordeal, the accused is condemned or acquitted based on their physical endurance, not on the justice of the facts.]

II.25. The People's Reaction

In the Protoevangelium of James 16.03
And all the people were amazed, because no sin was found in them. Then the priest said, 'If the Lord God has not revealed your sins, neither will I judge you.' And he released them. And Joseph took Mary with him and returned home, full of joy and glorifying the God of Israel.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 12:05
Then everyone began to kiss her feet and embrace her knees, begging her forgiveness for their evil suspicions. And she was led home with joy and gladness by the people, the priests, and all the virgins. And they cried out, saying, 'Blessed be your name, O Lord, forever, for he has manifested your holiness to all his people Israel.'
[Note: The passages above show how the naive religious authorities and the superstitious people of that region and time believed in justice through trial by ordeal, based on the unfounded belief that God's intervention determined the outcome of the trial. For, when one lives in a superstitious environment, such as in Jewish culture, where and when the dynamics of nature were not yet understood, the conclusion is that everything happens by the will of God or the devil; therefore, nothing escapes divine or demonic interference, consequently chance does not exist, and thus chance is used, deceptively, even as a judge.]
The phrase: "…glorifying the God of Israel" is ethnocentric and xenophobic; why not glorify the God of all humanity?]

II.26. Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem

In Luke 2:4-5
And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, called Bethlehem, because he was of the

house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pregnant.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 13:1
It was therefore necessary for Joseph to register with Mary in Bethlehem, because he was of the tribe of Judah and of the house and family of David.

In the Story of Joseph the Carpenter 07
Then the old man, righteous Joseph, arose, took the virgin Mary, and went to Bethlehem, for the time of her delivery was near. Joseph inscribed his name on the list; for Joseph, son of David, Mary's husband, was of the tribe of Judah.

In the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus 02
In the year 309 c. e., Augustus decreed that everyone should register in their place of origin. So Joseph got up, took Mary, his wife, and left Jerusalem, going to Bethlehem, intending to register with his family in his hometown.

In Liber Flavus 60
When Joseph (formerly called Moab Justus, because of his righteousness) heard this, he and his family—he, the Virgin Mary, and his three sons Simeon, Amnon, and James the Just—set out from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judah, for that was the city of David, and Joseph was born there. For Joseph and Mary were of the lineage of David; there were exactly forty generations between Joseph and David. For this reason, therefore, they went to Bethlehem in Judah to pay Caesar’s tribute.

II.27. Mary's Vision of Two Peoples

In the Protoevangelium of James 17.02

So Joseph saddled his donkey and had her ride on it; his son went ahead, and Joseph followed him. They came to about a third mile. Joseph turned around and saw her looking sad, and he said to himself, “Perhaps the baby is causing her distress.” Again Joseph turned around and saw her laughing, and he said to her, “Mary, why do I see your face sometimes looking sad and sometimes laughing?” Mary answered Joseph, “I see with my eyes two peoples: one that weeps and mourns, and another that rejoices and exults.”

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 13:1
As Joseph and Mary were walking along the road to Bethlehem, Mary said to Joseph, “I see two peoples before me: one weeping and the other rejoicing.” Joseph replied, “Stay still on your donkey and don’t say anything unnecessary.” Then a beautiful child dressed in white appeared before them and said to Joseph, “Why did you say that Mary’s words about the two peoples were unnecessary? For she saw the Jewish people weeping because they turned away from their God, and the Gentile people rejoicing because they have now drawn near to the Lord, just as he promised our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For the time is near when Abraham’s offspring will bless all nations.”

In. Book of Trout 66-7
And Mary, entering the house, immediately began to pray and keep vigil, with her face turned toward heaven. Then Simeon said to his father, “I see the Virgin speaking, but I do not see with whom she speaks.” “With the angels of heaven,” Joseph replied. Then Joseph saw Mary weeping and deeply saddened, and immediately afterwards rejoicing and exulting. “What is this, Virgin?” Joseph asked, “that at one moment you show joy and gladness, and at another, sadness and sorrow?” She answered, “I see two peoples,” she said, “one weeping and suffering, and the other joyful and radiant.” “This has a special meaning,” said Joseph, “these are the Jews who are destined to crucify Christ and scatter his disciples;

they are therefore the ones who are suffering. The Gentile people are the other people: they rejoice and exult because they were destined to believe in Christ from then on." Then Joseph said, "Lie down, Virgin, and sleep; And let Simeon anoint her feet with oil, and rest until God gives her birth.'

In Liber Flavus 66
"Father," said Simeon, "the young woman is speaking, and I don't know to whom she is speaking. I believe she is suffering from weariness and anguish," said Joseph. And when Joseph looked at Mary, he saw that she was sometimes sad, sometimes joyful. "How is it possible, girl," he said, "that one moment you are sad and the next you are happy?" "I see two peoples," she said, "one in mourning and the other in joy, and the Holy Scriptures tell us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice." Joseph told her to go to bed and rest. "O Simeon," he said, "anoint the virgin's feet with oil." Simeon did so.

II.28. Mary's Weariness

In Book of Numbers 62:1
It was there that the Virgin Mary grew weary, for she could neither ride nor walk, because her time was drawing near. So Mary remained in that place, and James and Simeon with her, and the five virgins. Joseph and Abion then went to Bethlehem of Judah to pay the tribute and seek lodging.

In Liber Flavus 62:1
As they approached the city, Joseph and Ammon went on to find lodging, while Mary stayed behind with James the Kneeling and Simeon, for she was very tired from the journey and was near the time of her delivery. The journey from Nazareth in Galilee to Jerusalem took four days, and from Jerusalem to Bethlehem of

Judah, another two days. It was no wonder, therefore, that the young woman was exhausted after the long journey.

II. 29. The Birth of Jesus

In the Protoevangelium of James 17:3–18:1
And when they were halfway there, Mary said to him, “Joseph, put me off the donkey, for the child in my womb is pressing on me to come out.” So he took her off the donkey and said to her, “Where can I take you and hide your shame? For this place is deserted.” And there he found a cave, and he brought her into it and left her in the care of his sons.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 13:2
And having said this, the angel commanded the beast to rise, for the hour of its birth was near; and he commanded Mary to descend from the beast and enter a cave where it was always dark, because the light of day did not reach there. And when Mary entered the cave, it began to shine with such intensity as if it were the sixth hour of the day. The light of God shone so brightly in the cave that neither day nor night lacked light while Mary was there.

In the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus 2
And when they came to a cave, Mary told Joseph that the time of her delivery was approaching and that he could not go into the city; 'But,' she said, 'let us go into this cave.' This happened at sunset.

In Book of Numbers 63:1
After this, Joseph went to look for lodging throughout Bethlehem and saw a small, isolated house on the outskirts, far from the others, without any other houses or dwellings nearby, a small, narrow hut with a low roof. He went to look at the house and said, “It seems to me that this is a guest hut, and it is appropriate that we stay here, and it is easier for the Virgin to give birth here, since it is far from the

sounds of men and the summoning of the people." The house looked like a small cave, a stable, where there was a donkey and a calf, belonging to the owner of the house, and a small round stool on the floor of the house, where guests usually sat. "Let us stay here, son," said Joseph, "for the sake of the exalted virgin who comes exhausted towards us. Wait for her, and I will go to the city to see if I can find someone there to whom I can offer some of my crafts in exchange for tonight's dinner."

In Liber Flavus 63:1
Then Joseph looked up and saw a small, isolated house, situated beside the city, and said, "We should stay in this house, for it seems to be a guest house." So Joseph went in and looked around. "It is a small dwelling," he said, "but even so, it is suitable for poor people. It is far from the hustle and bustle, the clamour, and the ostentation of the population. Stay here, son, while I go to the city to show my wares and my fine handcrafted work, hoping to find someone who will give me something in return."

In Luke 1:6-7
While they were there, the time came for her (Mary) to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In the Quran 19.23-6
Then, the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm tree. She (Mary) exclaimed: "Woe is me! If only I had died before this and were only a distant memory!"
Then a voice reassured her from beneath her: "Do not worry! Your Lord has provided a stream at your feet.
Shake the trunk of this palm tree towards you, and it will drop fresh, ripe dates on you.

So eat, drink, and be at peace. But if you see any of these people, say, “I have taken a vow of silence to the Most Glorious, therefore I will not speak to anyone today.”
Also, Quran 23:50: We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and We provided them shelter on a peaceful hill beside a spring of flowing water
.
In Matthew 2:11
(The Three Wise Men) upon entering the house, saw the child with Mary, his mother, and, falling down, they worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
[Note: In this last passage, the Magi entered a “house” (φάτνη- oikia) to find Mary and Jesus, whereas, in the passage from Luke 2:7, Mary gave birth in a stable, since she laid him in a “manger” (φάτνη – fatne), as there was no room at the inn (κατάλυμα - kataluma). A manger is a trough, made of wood or stone, used in stables to serve food to animals. In the Protoevangelium of James 18.01, Mary gave birth in a “cave” (σπήλαιον – spelaion), in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 13.02, there is a difference in wording between the Latin text of Aurelius Otero and that of Bart Ehrman; in the former, she gave birth in an “underground grotto” (speluncam subterraneam) and in the latter in a “grotto” where there was always darkness” (speluncam in qua semper tenebrae erant). In the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus 2, in a “grotto”. In the Leabhar Breac 63, in a “house that looked like a small cave, a stable, where there was a donkey and a calf”, in Liber Flavus 63.01 in a “small isolated house, situated next to the city”. And in the most different of all the above, in the Quran 19.23, “next to the trunk of a date palm (jiz’in nakhlati), “upon a spring of flowing water on a tranquil hill.” In short, Mary's childbirth in the Quran was more comfortable and dignified than in the canonical and apocryphal gospels.

II.30. Mary Shows the Baby to the People and Jesus Speaks in the Cradle

In the Quran 19.27-33
Then she (Mary) returned to her people, carrying him (Jesus). They said in shock, “O Mary! You have certainly done a terrible thing!”
"O sister of Aaron! Your father was not an indecent man, nor was your mother impure."
Then she pointed to the baby. They exclaimed, "How can we talk to a baby in a crib?"
Jesus declared: “I am truly a servant of Allah. He has destined me to receive the Scriptures and to be a prophet.”
He made me a blessing wherever I go and commanded me to establish prayer and pay the alms tax as long as I live, and to be kind to my mother. He did not make me arrogant or defiant. May peace be with me on the day I am born, on the day I die, and on the day I am resurrected!
[Note: Jesus' speech in the cradle also appears in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus I.02, but with a shorter and different text: “I am Jesus, the Son of God, the Word (ό λόγος), whom you begot according to the announcement of the angel Gabriel. My Father sent me for the salvation of the world.”] 10

II.31. Other Mentions of Mary in the Quran

While the name Mary is mentioned 19 times in the New Testament, the Quran mentions her in 34 passages, mostly as "the Son of Mary" to refer to Jesus, or "the Mother of Jesus" to refer to Mary. Conversely, there are more stories about Mary in the Gospels than in the Quran. Mary's importance in the Quran is solely that of being the mother of Jesus; she has no other role beyond this. And in both scriptures, at most her role was to bring Jesus into the world through an extraordinary conception. The sexism of that time is blatant, as a curious fact about Mary in the Quran is that she is the

only woman mentioned by name; all the others are referred to as the wives of Noah, Lot, Pharaoh (66:10-12), Imran, Zechariah, and the Queen of Sheba (27:22). Most of these women are also not mentioned by name in the Bible. Mary's mother is not called by name, either in the Bible or the Quran, only in the later apocryphal texts. Furthermore, she is not referred to by the expression "Virgin Mary" in either the Gospels or the Quran, although both texts acknowledge her virginity; therefore, the title "Virgin Mary" is a later creation. At the time of the Quran's composition, Mary was already called "Virgin Mary" by Christians in general. "Remember her (i.e., Mary) who guarded her chastity. Then We breathed into her 11 of Our Spirit and made her and her son (Jesus) a sign for the peoples" 12 (Quran, 21.91). Also: “We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and We gave them shelter on a tranquil hill by flowing waters” 13 (Quran 23:50). “And Mary, daughter of Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our Spirit. She accepted the truth of the words and the scriptures from her Lord, and she was truly devout” (Quran, 66:12).

Perhaps in an attempt to lessen the impetus to deify Mary and Jesus, the Quran 5:75 restricts the exaltation in the following way: “…. His mother was a virtuous woman. They both ate food…” 14. Mary is defended from the infamies of the Jews in 4:156: “and by the denial and outrageous accusation against Mary.” The next verse, 4:157, is of particular interest to Christians, since it denies the crucifixion of Jesus“…and by boasting: 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God.' But they did not kill him nor crucify him—they only made it appear so. Even those who argue in favour of this 'crucifixion' are in doubt. They have no knowledge whatsoever, they only make assumptions. Certainly they did not kill him.” This Quranic passage gave rise to legends about Jesus' survival and his travels to the East. The most widespread belief is that Jesus lived in India until an advanced age and is buried in the Roza Bal sanctuary in the city of Srinagar, in the state of Kashmir, India. Another passage in the Quran that is curious for a

Christian is verse 5:75, in which Jesus is not recognised as the "Son of God," but as just another messenger of Allah: "The Messiah, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger (rasulun). Many messengers preceded him. His mother was a virtuous woman. They both ate food. See how We have shown them signs, and see how they are deceived and turn away from the truth."

Mary's mother asks Allah for protection for her daughter in the Quran 3:35-6: “And when the wife of Imran (Mary's mother) said, “My Lord! I dedicate what is in my womb entirely to Your service, accept it from me. You are truly the All-Present, the All-Knowing.” (3:35). “When she gave birth, she said, “My Lord! I have given birth to a girl,”—and Allah knew what she had given birth to—“and the boy is not like the girl. I named her Mary, and I seek Your protection for her and her offspring from Satan, the accursed one.”

II.32. Mary in Other Islamic Scriptures

Ibn Ishāq praised Mary thus in *The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah):* “Mary, the Virgin, the kind, the pure, so that she conceived Jesus” (GUILLAUME, 2004: 657). In hadith number 623, volume 4, book 55, of the Sahih Al-Bukhari collection, narrated by Abu Musa, Mary is praised in the following way: The Apostle of Allah said, “Many among men have attained the level of perfection, but none among women have attained this level except Asia, the wife of Pharaoh, and Mary, the daughter of Imran…”. That is, men achieve perfection in great numbers, but women who reach such a level are few, a very clear portrait of the idea of the inferiority of women of that time and place.

Therefore, a child cries loudly at birth because of the touch of Satan, except Mary and her son (Jesus)…” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, hadith 641, volume 4, book 55). Well, believing that “the child cries at birth because of the touch of Satan” is an example of the high degree of superstition of the people of that time and the cultural isolation of the place where Muhammad lived. Further praise for

Mary is found in the following hadith, narrated by Ali: 'I heard the Prophet say; “Mary, the daughter of Imran, was the best among the women (of the world in her time) and Khadija (Muhammad's first wife) is the best among the women (of this nation)” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, hadith 642, volume 4, book 55). Quraish 15 are the best. They are compassionate and kind to their children and the best guardians of their husbands' properties.” Abu Haraira added: “Mary, the daughter of Imran, never rode a camel” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, hadith 643, volume 4, book 55). According to narratives in the canonical and apocryphal gospels, Mary usually rode a donkey or a female donkey. Just as in the Quran, most mentions of Mary in the hadiths are as “Jesus, the son of Mary,” many sayings of Muhammad are also repeated exhaustively in the hadiths, making these collections very extensive.

III. The Pejorative Versions

III.01. The Antiquity of Anti-Christian Narratives

Just as the apocryphal gospels diverge from the canonical gospels in their accounts of Jesus' life and sayings, but without being hostile to him, the anti-Christian narratives of the Jews, on the contrary, depreciate and mock Jesus. These hostile accounts are not medieval creations, as many Christians believe. Indeed, there are documents confirming that Jewish versions of gospel episodes, very different from the versions in the canonical and apocryphal gospels, were already circulating orally in the second century; they were merely expanded during the Middle Ages. The earliest record appears in the work *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* , by the Christian apologist Justin Martyr, probably composed in the year 135 CE. In it, Trypho, a fictional Jew created by Justin for literary purposes only, states that “the Jews sent from Jerusalem chose men throughout the land to say that the impious heresies of the Christians had spread and to report such things against them (the Christians), things that

only those who do not know them say…". "These chosen men demonstrated great zeal in publishing throughout the land bitter, obscure, and unjust things. Namely, that Jesus was a magician and a Galilean deceiver, whose body was stolen from the tomb by his disciples at night" (SCHÄFER, 2014: 05). In other words, that Jesus was "an impostor from Galilee, whom we crucified, but whom his disciples stole at night from the tomb where he lay when he was taken down from the cross, and now they deceive men by claiming that he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven" (*Dialogue with Trypho* , *The Jew* , chapter 108). That the theft of Jesus' body was a controversy from the early years can be confirmed in the Gospel of Matthew 28:12-15, when the Jewish priests met with the religious leaders and devised a plan. They "gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You must declare the following: His disciples came during the night and stole the body while they were sleeping. (…).' So the soldiers took the money and followed their instructions. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this day" (NIV-PT, Mt. 28:12-15).

Even more hostile is the summary of Jesus' life in *The True Doctrine* (Gr. Λόγος Αληθής – *Logos Alethes*) by the Greek thinker Celsus, a lost work from the 2nd century CE, but largely reproduced in the heresiology *Against Celsus* (Gr. Κατά Κελσου – *Kata Kelsou*) by the Christian Origen (3rd century CE), written with the intention of refuting the criticisms of the aforementioned Greek author. Celsus accused Jesus of having invented his birth from a virgin; and warns that Jesus was born in a Jewish village, to a poor country woman who earned her living by weaving, and that she was expelled from her home by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was condemned for adultery; that after being expelled by her husband, she wandered for a time, then she unfortunately gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate son, who, having worked as a servant in Egypt, due to his poverty, acquired some miraculous powers, of which the Egyptians are very proud; he returned to his own country, highly enthusiastic because of them, and

through these powers proclaimed himself a god (*Origen Against Celsus* , vol. I, l. 28 and 32 – CHADWICK, 1953: 28 and 31). Celsus also revealed his suspicion about the veracity of the Gospel accounts, saying that “I could say many things concerning the events of Jesus’ life that are true, and not as those recorded by the disciples…” (*Origen Against Celsus* , vol. II, II. 13 – CHADWICK, 1953: 78). Further on he adds that some “Christian believers, like people in a fit of drunkenness, have corrupted the Gospels from their original integrity, to a triple, quadruple, and multiple degree, and have reshaped them in such a way that they could answer objections” (*Origen Against Celsus* , vol. II, II.27 – CHADWICK, 1953: 90).

Celsus doubted the miraculous phenomena that occurred during Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, as narrated in the canonical gospels, directly questioning Jesus in the following way: “When you were bathing, besides John, you said that something that had the appearance of a bird landed on you. What reliable witness saw such an apparition, or who heard a voice from heaven declaring you to be the Son of God? What proof is there of this, except your own statement and the declaration of another of those individuals who were punished along with you?” *(Origen Against Celsus* , I. 41 – CHADWICK, 1953). Celsus also questioned Jesus' divinity in relation to his flight after the condemnation, an episode that does not appear in the canonical gospels, nor in the apocrypha, but is known from the Jewish tradition of that time, in the following way: “How can we judge him to be a god, who not only, in other aspects, as has been reported, did not fulfil his promises, but also, after being sentenced and…” condemned, as deserving of punishment, he was caught trying to hide and striving to flee in a humiliating manner, and was betrayed by those he called disciples? (*Origen Against Celsus* , II. 09 – CHADWICK, 1953: 73; for more on Celsus's criticisms of Christianity, see: HOFFMANN, 1987 and on Mary in Celsus's opinion: TIJSSELING, 2022: 81-8).

Regarding the Jewish version of Jesus, Tertullian, the Christian author of *De Spectaculis* 30 (circa 200 CE), wrote: “This is

he… that son of a carpenter or a prostitute, the one who broke the Sabbath, that Samaritan and possessed by demons! This is he, whom you bought from Judas! This is he, who was beaten with a rod and fist, who was defiled with spit, to whom they gave gall and vinegar to drink! This is he, whom his disciples secretly took away, so that one could say that he had risen, unless it was the gardener who removed him, so that his lettuces would not be damaged by the crowd of curious onlookers" (SCHÄFER, 2014: 07).

However, all these sources refer to informal debates between Jews and Christians. "The first formal discussion is reported in the 8th-century CE work *Vita Silvestri , which also contains references to ideas and situations known in the Toledot Yeshu. In the Vita Silvestri ,* twelve rabbis are sent from Jerusalem to Rome to discuss Christian doctrine with Bishop Sylvester. During the debate, they repeatedly question the virgin birth of Jesus and eventually use the Ineffable Name to prove their argument. The bishop, however, prevails before them with the help of the name of Jesus" (SCHÄFER, 2014: 06). Over time, new hostile episodes were added to this Jewish tradition and transmitted orally from generation to generation, until some passages were included, through mentions, in the Talmud, perhaps around the year 600 CE, then in the rabbinic commentary *Midrash*, to finally be compiled in written form, through different versions, during the Middle Ages, in a collection known collectively as *Sefer Toledoth Yeshu* (The Book of the History of the Life of Jesus).

III.02. Mary in the Babylonian Talmud

Referring to Jesus, known in the Talmud as ben Stada (son of Stada – Mary), or ben Pandera 16 (son of Pandera), 17 the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbath 104b, in editions not censored by the Church during the Middle Ages, 18 mentions, through a confusing passage, with doubts among the interlocutors about Jesus' parents, that: "Rav Hisda 19 said: His mother's

husband, who acted as his father, was called Stada, but the one who had relations with his mother and begot him was called Pandera… Wasn't his mother's husband Pappos ben Yehuda? In fact, his mother was called Stada and he received the name ben Stada in her honor. The Gemara asks: But wasn't his mother Miriam, who braided women's hair? The Gemara explains: This is not a contradiction deviated 21 [setat da] from her husband" (William Davidson edition). The doubts between the interlocutors mentioned above may have been intentionally inserted to show the contempt and disregard of the Jews for Christianity; that is, the Jews did not take care to record the facts and characters of the New Testament in detail because they considered them unimportant, so they used them as examples of wrongdoing, with many divergences from the NT, whether canonical or apocryphal. Thus, the doubts demonstrate that the authors of the Talmud had only a vague knowledge about the parents of Jesus. While Peter Schäfer, on the other hand, perceives a different meaning in this passage: "The Talmud discusses the parents of Jesus/Yeshu. B. Shabb. 104b and b. Sanh 67a seek to combine the different traditions regarding the names of Yeshu's parents and propose a solution to the enigma resulting from the contradictory names. According to one tradition, Yeshu could be the son of his mother's lover, Pandera, or of her husband, Stada. Another tradition suggests that the husband's name was Pappos ben Yehudah, while Stada was his mother's name. Yet another tradition, probably confusing the images of Mary and Mary Magdalene, says that Yeshu's mother's name was Miriam, whose occupation was "letting women's hair grow." The suggestion then suggests that Stada was a surname of Miriam because she was sotah, that is, suspected of adultery. These are known from other sources" (SCHÄFER, 2014: 46).

Regarding the character Pappos ben Jehudah (or Yehuda), mentioned in the Talmudic passage Shabbath 104b as the husband of Jesus' mother, R. Travers Herford suggested that "he was the name of a man who was known to have been so suspicious of his

wife that he would lock her in the house whenever he went out. (…) Probably, this erroneous opinion, along with the tradition that Pappos ben Jehudah was jealous of his wife, justifies the mixing of his name with the story of Jesus' parents" (HERFORD, 2006: 40). 22 But this is only conjecture. Therefore, Jesus (ben Stada) was an illegitimate son, the result of an adulterous relationship, very different from the Christian and Quranic version that states he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that is, a pejorative version of Jesus' conception. Further on, in the same paragraph of this text, it states that Stada (Mary, mother of Jesus) was a hairdresser. In a passage that is also confusing and full of doubts, which almost literally repeats the passage from Shabbath 104b, chapter 67a of the uncensored editions of the Sanhedrin Tractate, Pandera, the adulterous father of Jesus (ben Pandera), is mentioned as the "lover" of Jesus' mother, "who gave birth to this bastard" (Jesus). The divergence between the Jews and the Gospels is so great that in this passage (Sanhedrin 67a), Miriam (Mary), the one who braided women's hair, is called megaddela neshaya, that is, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is identified with Mary Magdalene, most likely because the author of this passage already knew the latter's reputation as a prostitute, hence the identification of the two Marys. Once again, this is an example of the Talmudic authors' carelessness in consulting the Gospels, another sign of their contempt for Christianity and its insignificance; in other words, for the Jews, Jesus was nothing more than another Jewish preacher among so many others from antiquity who proclaimed themselves the Messiah. The reason for these discrepancies is explained by R. Travers Herford, who states that these Talmudic passages "cannot be earlier than the beginning of the fourth century, and even more so, an account of what was said in Babylon, and not in Palestine" (HERFORD, 2006: 41). In other words, due to the distance, the Jews residing in Babylon did not have access to Christian texts with the same ease and interaction as the Jews of Palestine, and some data relate to facts and ideas that emerged in the centuries following the rise of Christianity, such as the late

transformation of Mary Magdalene into a prostitute; also, the Jewish characters mentioned are later than the beginning of the fourth century CE.

Already in the Canonical Gospel, the passage in John 8:41 hints that some Jews, at the time of Jesus' ministry, were aware of the rumours that Jesus' birth was the result of an illicit relationship, that is, that Jesus was an illegitimate son, when, during a discussion between Jesus and a group of Jews, the latter responded, perhaps through an implicit provocation, that: “We were not born of fornication (ἐκ πορνείας – ék porneías). The most general meaning of πορνεία (porneia) is “prostitution” and can also mean “adultery,” “fornication,” or “behavior similar to a prostitute.” The noun derives from the verb πορνεύω – porneúo (to prostitute), hence the term πόρνη – porne (prostitute). But this clue is merely a hypothesis. 23 Being the son, as was supposed (ὡς ἐνομίζετο – os enomízeto), of Joseph, son of Heli.” The passage indicates that the author of this gospel was not certain that Joseph was actually Jesus' father, hence the phrase ὡς ἐνομίζετο – os enomízeto (as was supposed). Christians argue that this assumption arises because Jesus was not Joseph's biological son, but rather the son of the Holy Spirit, while Jews argue that the assumption stems from the suspicion that Jesus was the son of an adulterous relationship at that time, as later included in the Talmud.

While in other Gospel passages, doubt and suspicion about Jesus' illegitimate origin do not appear. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” (Luke 4:22) and “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary? Aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?” (Matthew 13:55). In another passage from Mark 6:03, Jesus is called only “carpenter,” instead of “son of the carpenter,” οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων – oúx outós éstin ó tékton (isn’t this the carpenter?). “Isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? And aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they were offended by him” (Mark 6:03). In the first sentence, some manuscripts and translations add “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?” Instead of just carpenter, some editions translate τέκτων – tékton as

“stonemason,” since the word has diverse meanings, such as craftsman, builder, author, and master of any art. In the Vulgate (Latin) version, the word τέκτων – was translated as “faber,” which means a worker who works with metal, stone, ivory, and wood; therefore, a carpenter, a blacksmith, or a stonemason, that is, a craftsman. These passages in the canonical gospels leave doubts about the true nature of Jesus' birth, whether through an adulterous relationship or through a miraculous conception. Since we lack impartial historical data, as the versions we have are ideological and sectarian in nature, that is, one side (Jewish) attempting to denigrate his birth, and the other side (Christian) attempting to deify him—this is because we lack impartial historical data.

In an episode from Tractate Chagigah 4b of the Babylonian Talmud, Mary is likely mentioned in a mocking passage. “The Angel of Death said to his agent: Go and bring me, that is, kill, Miriam (Mary), the one who arranges, that is, the one who braids women's hair. He went, but instead brought him Miriam, the one who cares for babies. The Angel of Death said to him: I told you to bring Miriam, the one who braids women's hair. His agent said to him: If so, return her to life. He said to him: Since you brought her, let her be counted among the deceased. Apparently, this woman died involuntarily. Rav Beivai asked the agent: But, since her time to die had not yet come, how did you manage to kill her? The agent replied that he had the opportunity, for she was holding a shovel in her hand and was lighting a fire with it” (William Davidson edition). The Talmud is full of information incompatible with the New Testament, some even anachronistic, and when dealing with New Testament characters, the treatment is almost always mocking.

III.03. The Sefer Toledoth Yeshu Collection

As mentioned above, this is more of a collection of anti-Christian gospels, also known as anti-gospels, which coincide or diverge in some passages from one version to another, than a text

with uniform content across all manuscripts found so far. Some authors prefer to characterise the *Toledoth Yeshu* as a collection of medieval parodies of the Christian gospels. This collection circulated widely in Jewish communities during the Middle Ages, although it was never canonised in Judaism, thus remaining as a popular text. Some Jews also knew the narratives by heart and transmitted them orally to their children and grandchildren. Its authors are unknown, as studies suggest that this collection is a compilation extracted from oral narratives and earlier Jewish writings, especially some passages from the Talmud and *Midrash* where *Yeshu* (Jesus) is mentioned. The dates of compilation into written form are uncertain; the oldest manuscript is from the 11th century CE, although its content can be found in clues to the existence of an anti-evangelical narrative, through mentions in the works of authors from late antiquity, such as Justin, Celsus, and Tertullian.

According to Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer, the earliest mention of the *Toledoth*, as a written composition, is that made by Agobard, Archbishop of Lyon, circa 726-80 CE, and his successor Amulus, circa 849 CE (SCHAFER, 2014: vol. I, 03), which coincides with the oldest manuscripts of the *Toledoth Yeshu* . Regarding Mary, Amulus wrote in his work *Liber Contra Iudaeos* 40: “(Jesus) is impious and the son of an impious man, that is, (someone) of uncertain origin whom they call Pandera (and) with whom they say the mother of (our) Lord committed adultery” (SCHÄFER, 2014:, vol. I, 47). The satirical nature can already be seen in the version reproduced by Agobard, where Jesus (*Yeshu*) is arrested by Emperor Tiberius, and in order to escape imprisonment, Jesus promises the emperor that his daughter will become pregnant, without the participation of a man, and give birth to a boy. She does indeed become pregnant, but gives birth to a stone. Then Jesus is condemned to death. At the execution, instead of being affixed to a cross, as in the canonical gospels, he is affixed to a forked stick, just as was done with the abominable magicians (SCHÄFER, 2014: vol. I, 03).

Because he was never canonised, that is, due to his popular character, the compilers and copyists of the *Toledoth Yeshu* manuscripts had ample freedom to add, omit, and alter episodes in the written text according to their interests, hence the diversity of versions. The first translation of the *Toledoth Yeshu* into a modern language was the English version by Sabine Baring-Gould, T*he Lost and Hostile Gospels: an Essay on the Toledoth Jeshu and the Petrine and Pauline Gospels of the First Three Centuries of Which Fragments Remain**, from 1874, where the author translated and analysed the Wagenseil and Huldreich versions. Peter Schäfer and Michael Meerson used 15 different manuscripts in the book T*oledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus,* the reference work for the study of the *Toledoth Yeshu* today. To learn or update your knowledge about how the Jews perceived Jesus from the first centuries, consult *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (2000), pp. 75-134, by Robert C. Van Voorst and the study *Jewish Perspectives on Jesus* by Michael J. Cook in T*he Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (2011), p. 215-31.

It is not yet possible to be certain, but the reason for the growth of such a large number of new anti-Christian gospels in the ghettos during the Middle Ages may have been due to resentment over the forced conversions, persecutions, condemnations, and executions of Jews by the Church. Some authors defend this hypothesis. Furthermore, due to the differences in the accounts of the life and sayings of *Yeshu* (Jesus) in the *Toledoth Yeshu* and the accounts of the life and sayings of Jesus in the canonical gospels, some Christians resist admitting that the *Yeshu* of the *Toledoth*, as well as the *Yeshu* of other rabbinic scriptures, is the same Jesus of the official gospels; that is, they are two distinct figures (MAZA, 1992: 801). This may be due to the good diplomacy between Christians and Jews, or similarly, some Jews deny that the *Yeshu* in the *Toledoth Yeshu* is the same Jesus of the canonical gospels in order to avoid friction with Christians. For

Christians, the *Toledoth Yeshu* is a jumble of rumours. The controversy over whether *Yeshu* and Jesus are the same protagonist still persists, although broader and more in-depth historical studies point to the current conclusion that the *Yeshu* of the *Toledoth* is the Jesus of the canonical gospels, despite the narratives sometimes coinciding and sometimes diverging. It is possible to perceive an underlying, derogatory intention to create new narratives of Jesus' life, following the main episodes of Jesus' life from the canonical gospels, such as the illegitimate birth instead of the divine birth, the miracles, the disciples, the death on a cabbage stalk instead of the cross, the concealment of the body instead of the resurrection, etc. The differences exist because of the intention of the gospel composers to exalt Jesus and that of the compilers of the different versions of the *Toledoth* to depreciate him. These circumstances leave us unable to know, based on reliably historical documentation, what the life of Jesus (Jeshu) was like, independent of the added myths and rumours.

III.04. The Manuscripts of *Toledoth Yeshu*

Below is a list of the manuscripts of the Sefer *Toledoth Yeshu* used by Peter Schäfer and Michael Meerson, with the locations where they are deposited and their corresponding record numbers, Vol. I, pp. 127ff:

Group I

Oriental Antigo A – Cambridge University Library (SCHÄFER, 2014: Vol. I, 127).

Oriental Antique A – New York JTS 2529.2 (idem: 135)

Oriental Antique B – New York JTS 8998 (idem: 137)

Oriental Antigo C – St. Petersburg RNL EVR 2 a 105/9 (idem: 145)

Yemenite Antigo – New York JTS 6312 (idem: 147)

Byzantine – St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274 (idem: 155)

Group II

Ashkenazi A – Strassburg BnV 3974 (idem: 167)

Ashkenazi B – New York JTS 2221 (idem: 185)
Yemenite Tardio A – New York JTS 2343 (idem: 206)
Late Eastern – Jerusalem Benayahu 25.4 (idem: 221)
Italian A – Leipzig BH 17 1-18 (idem: 232)
Italian B – Parma 2091 De Rossi 1271 (ditto: 275)
Group III
Wagenseil – Cambridge MA Harvard Houghton Library 57 (idem: 286)
Huldreich – Amsterdam Hs Ros 442 (idem: 305)
Eslavo A – Princeton Firestone Library (idem: 323).

III.05. Mary in the Sefer Toledoth Yeshu Collection

In the Sefer Toledoth Yeshu collection, Mary is mentioned most often in the episodes of her adulterous relationship with Pandera and in the episode of the revelation of her pregnancy; after these, she almost disappears from the narratives. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to these episodes here. Note that the accounts among the different versions below have some points of coincidence and others of divergence, both among themselves and even more so with the Gospels; some are even contradictory, or sometimes, differently, complement the other versions. When the divergences are very large in relation to the Gospels and the Quran, it even seems that it is not referring to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Therefore, to be sure that the biblical characters are the same as those in the Toledoth Yeshu, it is necessary to read the entire text and, with that, to realise that the underlying thread of the story is extracted from the Gospels, but altered to a pejorative and, in some passages, even mocking versions. The underlying derogatory intent becomes clear when we read the entire story, as well as the fact that all the texts have a similar script, with the accounts in almost the same order.

As we have already mentioned, the Toledoth Yeshu collection was never canonised in Judaism, but it enjoyed significant acceptance in Jewish communities, especially during the Middle

Ages, when persecutions, censorship of Jewish books, forced conversions, confiscation of property, and book burnings increased, along with the belief that Jews were responsible for Jesus' death. This led to a significant expansion of new compositions, with the inclusion of more details and the creation of new texts, both oral and manuscript. The following excerpts are arranged in order from oldest and shortest first to latest and longest, as the derogatory stories grew longer over time.

III.06. The Conception of Yeshu (Jesus)

In Early Yemenite Manuscript, folio 67v 30-6:
Once, I (Mary) went out at night to wash my shawls after my period, and I was still impure. Then, someone approached me, and I did not recognise him, and he raped me, and so I conceived this boy (Yeshu – Jesus) (SCHÄFER, 2014: vol. I, 148).

In Byzantine Manuscript, 21v 10-4
On the eve of the Sabbath, around midnight, (Joseph) went out to the synagogue to pray, and this wicked man (Pandera) waited for him. He (Pandera) opened the gate and went up to his bed and lay with Miriam (Mary, mother of Jesus), who thought he was her husband, Joseph. When this wicked man satisfied his desires twice, she became pregnant, and he shut the door and escaped from Joseph's house. (Ibid: 155).

In Ashkenazi Manuscript A, folio 170r 01-09:
The beginning of Yeshu's creation. His mother, Miriam (Mary), was a descendant of Israel and had a fiancé of royal blood, from the house of David. His name was Yohanan. He knew the Scriptures well and was a very God-fearing man. And near the door of Miriam's (Mary's) house, across the street, there was a handsome man… Yosef (Pandera). One night, on the eve of the Sabbath, he (Pandera) passed by her door while drunk. He entered, and she thought in her

heart that it was her fiancé Yohanan. Ashamed, she hid her face, while the villain (Pandera) embraced and kissed her. She said to him, “Don't touch me, because I am menstruating,” but he was not alarmed and paid no attention to her words. He lay with her, and she conceived by him (Ibid: 167-8).

In Ashkenazi Manuscript B, folio 39r 5-20:
There was a man in Jerusalem, and he had a daughter named Miriam. She was beautiful and fair like no other (woman) in all of Israel, as well as modest in her actions. She was betrothed to a young man named Yohanan, and he was a scholarly, pious, and modest man, from the Davidic royal lineage. One day, Miriam (Mary) came to the door of her house to accompany her fiancé. Across from her house lived a man named Yosef ben Pandera, an attractive and pimply man. He looked up and saw Miriam and her beauty, that she was beautiful, and so he desired to lie with her as if she were a prostitute. He waited until her fiancé went to the synagogue, and she was alone inside the house. This happened at dusk, at night. He then walked silently towards her and found an open door. He entered her house, and she was sitting alone. Beginning his wickedness, he extinguished her candle. And the wicked will be silent in the darkness (1 Samuel 2:9). And in the darkness he walked toward her, embraced her and kissed her and entered into her (e.g., Genesis 29:23). He was like a mute who does not open his mouth (Psalm 38:14), and she thought he was her fiancé, for she did not recognise him. She cried out and wept with a bitter voice and said, “What are you doing now? I have just begun my period!” He remained silent (1 Sam. 10:27) and did not hear her or pay her any attention. He did everything she desired and wanted with her, and she became pregnant from their first sexual encounter that night (Ibid.: 185-6).

In Huldreich Manuscript, folio Ir 1-09:
Now, in the reign of Herod the proselyte, there was a man named Pappos ben Yehudah, and he had a wife whose name was Miriam

(Mary), daughter of Qalpus, sister of Rabbi Shimcon Qalpus. This Miriam, before her betrothal, was a hairdresser of women, married to Pappos according to the religion of Moses and Israel. She was of extraordinary beauty and was of the tribe of Benjamin. Her husband Pappos would not let her leave the house and would lock the door because of her, saying, “So that the wicked may not prostitute themselves with her.” And on the fast of Yom Kippur, the wicked Yosef Pander aha-Notsri (Yosef the Panther) passed by her window, and he was handsome. Seeing that no one was in her house, he raised his voice and cried out to her, “Miriam, Miriam, how long will you remain locked up?” She leaned over the window and replied, “Yosef, Yosef, save me!” Joseph went to get a ladder, and Miriam climbed out the window. They both fled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on Yom Kippur, and they lived in Bethlehem for many days, and no one recognised them. And Joseph lay with Miriam on the fast of Yom Kippur, and she conceived. (Ibid: 305-6).

In Wagenseil Manuscript 24 , folios 22r 1-18 and 22v 1.07:
In the year 671 of the fourth millennium, in the days of Yannai, the king, there was a great trouble concerning those who hate Israel, when a debauched, wicked, and vile man arose, of the tribe of Judah, and his name was Joseph Pandera. He was a tall man, powerful in war, and handsome. And most of his days were spent in fornication, lust, theft, and violence. He dwelt in Bethlehem of Judah, and near his house lived a certain Elinah. She had a daughter, and her name was Miriam. She is Miriam the hair braider of women, mentioned in the Talmud. And when she grew up, her mother betrothed her to a young man, and his name was Yohanan. He was a humble and modest young man, and he feared God. One day, Joseph (Pandera) was passing by Miriam's door and saw her, and a passion burned within him. He became increasingly needy and fell ill. His mother said to him, "Why are you so weak?" He answered and said to her, "I love Miriam, the betrothed, and now that Yohanan has betrothed her, I am in love." His mother said to him, "My son, do not

let your heart be troubled and be strong, I will give you wisdom. I have much money; I will give you some, and then you can spend your money to be chosen by Yohanan and become his friend. When he goes, go with him too; then it will be the right time for you to seduce Miriam." The idea seemed good to him. So he went to Yohanan, gave him money, and befriended him. And when Yohanan went to Miriam, Yosef also went with him. But when Miriam saw that he was friends with Yosef, it seemed wicked to her. She said to him, “Why are you friends with Yosef, when I know he is a wicked person?” For when you become friends with a wicked person, God will destroy their works (2 Chronicles 20:37). And Yohanan said to her, “I will not learn evil deeds from him. On the contrary, he will learn good deeds from me!” A parable illustrating this is that of a lit candle. Many people can light candles with it, but nothing is taken from it. So it is: He will learn good deeds from me. Once, Yohanan went to the house of Miriam, his fiancée, on the eve of the Sabbath, and stayed with her. She said to him, “Do not touch me, for I am menstruating.” And he did not touch her. During the Sabbath, Joseph Pandera gave three banquets to John, giving him food and good wine to drink; and he drank with him—he pretended to drink, but he did not drink. He gave John only enough to drink until he was drunk, and he lay down and slept there during the night after the Sabbath. That night there was rain, hail, thunder, and lightning (Exodus 19:16); and Joseph went to Miriam's house. He said, “Open the door for me, for the rain is heavy.” She said, “Who are you?” He said, “I am John, your fiancé.” She opened the door for him, and he recited the Shema with great devotion. The night was very dark. Then he went to the bed where Miriam was lying and lay down with her. She said to him, “Didn’t I tell you yesterday that I am menstruating?” He said:“It is because of a new precept taught in the house of study that it is permitted for a groom to lie with his bride even when she is menstruating. She supposed that he was Yohana, her groom, and lay with him. And it was in the morning that he slept with her again. She said to him: “Why do you add to the rebellion that comes to me

twice?" But he did not listen to her, but did what she wanted and went on his way (Ibid: 286-8).

[Note: These derogatory accounts are so different from the accounts of the Virgin Mary in the Gospels, whether canonical or apocryphal, as well as the Quran, that when read in isolation from the rest of the text, they seem to suggest that this is not the same Mary as in the laudatory accounts, leading a novice reader to believe otherwise. Much suspicion and debate ensued before it was proven that these Gospel characters (Jesus, Mary, Joseph, etc.), narrated in the Talmud and the Teledoth Yeshu collection, are in fact the same characters and episodes as in the Gospels, but with generations of the stories. The earliest records of these hostile versions, simultaneous with the formation of Christianity in the first decades and centuries, confirm their ancient origin, especially in Celsus, Porphyry, Justin, and other authors.] Therefore, what was added later was the expansion of the stories, with the inclusion of more details, according to the authors' imagination, filling in the gaps with more derogatory accounts, through oral compositions, in order to increase the depreciative charge and the consequent discredit of the Gospels, making the historicity of the accounts in the Toledoth Yeshu collection very discredited by those outside the Jewish tradition.

As in this episode of Jesus' conception and in subsequent ones, note that the accounts increase in length, being shorter in the oldest texts and longer in the most recent, showing that, over time, new stories were added, so we do not know if these additions were written records of preserved oral traditions, or the creation of new stories by the authors of the texts in order to fill gaps.

The derogatory nature of the portrayal is enormous when compared to the immaculate figure of Mary in the Gospels. While in the Early Yemenite manuscript, Mary is raped while washing her clothes, therefore Jesus is the product of rape, in the Byzantine manuscript, Mary was seduced and deceived by the wicked Pandera, who pretended to be her husband and defiled her, while her husband Joseph was away at the synagogue. This passage is so

difficult to believe that it seems more like a myth, due to Mary's unbelievable naiveté in not recognizing the differences between that man and her husband. In the Ashkenazi A manuscript, the story is expanded, including more details. This expansion of details continues in subsequent manuscripts, to the point where we find much more extensive episodes, not only in this one but in all manuscripts when we compare the lengths of the older manuscripts.
The most reasonable conclusion we can reach, therefore, when deprived of more reliable historical materials, is that not everything in the Gospels (canonical and apocryphal) can be history, nor can everything in the Toledoth Yeshu texts be entirely fiction.

III.07. The Revelation of Mary's Pregnancy

In the Byzantine Manuscript, folios 21v 14-21 and 22r 1.05:
From that sexual encounter, 25 she (Mary) became pregnant by Yeshu. After three months, her belly grew, and Yosef (Joseph) noticed it. He said to her, “Oh, Miriam, my beloved, what is this?” She replied to him, “Oh, my husband, from that Saturday eve, when you slept with me, I felt that I had become pregnant.” When Joseph heard these words from his wife, he said to her, “Oh, woe is me! What are you saying? This never happened! You should know that it was that wicked man who fought (with me) who did this.” She said to him, “Oh, my husband, I have not sinned!” And because of his great love for Miriam, for she was very (beautiful), he did not reveal what had happened, so that the matter would not have to go to trial. When, in time, the fetus became known, he feared that the local inhabitants might cause trouble, since she had always been barren. And Joseph took her and left his (city) of Nazareth. They went to a different place, to Zevgelation. Shelo 26 (Ibid: 155-6).

In Ashkenazi Manuscript A, folio 170r 10-27:
In the middle of the night, her fiancé, Rabbi Yohanan (Joseph), arrived. She said to him, “What is this? It has never been your

custom, since the day of our engagement, to visit me twice in the same night." He replied, "This is the first time I have come to visit you tonight." She said to him, "You came to visit me and I said, 'I am menstruating,' but you were not frightened, you satisfied your desire and left." Hearing this, he immediately understood that Yosef ben Pandera had been with her and done that. He left her and went to meet Rabban Shim'on ben Shetah. He said to him, "You should know what happened to me and my fiancée tonight. I came to her according to the custom (of the people), (but) before I touched her, she said to me, 'You already came to me once, and I told you that I am menstruating. You did not listen to me (but did) as you pleased and left.'" As soon as I heard those words from her, I left her." […] R. Shim'on ben Shetah said to him, "Whom do you suspect?" He said to him, "Ben Pandera, because he lives near her house and is pursuing her." What did he say to him? "I know you have no proof in this matter. Therefore, I advise you to remain silent. If he came once, it is impossible that he will not return. Act wisely. Invite and place witnesses against him." After a while, a rumour arose that Miriam was pregnant. Her fiancé Yohanan said, "She did not conceive by me. If I remain here, I will hear of my disgrace from the people every day." He got up and went to Babylon (Ibid: 168)

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In Huldreich Manuscript, folio Ir 9-27:

And in that year she (Mary) gave birth to Yeshua cha-Notsri (Jesus), and conceived again and had sons and daughters. Many days passed since these children of prostitution were born to her, and a man came from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. And when this man saw Miriam (Mary) and recognised her, he was silent and went to Jerusalem. He told Pappos (Joseph) that his wife Miriam had prostituted herself and given birth to children of prostitution to Yosef Pandera ha-Notsri. When Pappos heard these things, he went before King Herod and wept loudly and bitterly, and told the king that his wife Miriam had prostituted herself with Yosef Pandera ha-Notsri and given birth to (him) children of prostitution and bastards, and

(his) voice was heard in the king's court and in Jerusalem. When the villains—these are the relatives of Joseph Pandera 27 —heard this, they went to Joseph Pandera and said to him, “Joseph, go and flee, for you have been deemed liable to death. For the story has reached the king’s house, and the king is very angry with you, with Miriam, and with the children of prostitution (Hosea 2:06) that you had with her.” Joseph went and took Miriam and her sons and daughters, and they sat on the camel and fled from Bethlehem to Egypt. And at that time Herod came to Bethlehem and sought Joseph and Miriam and their children to stone them because they had committed an abomination in Israel, but he did not find them. And the king gave orders to kill all the infants in Bethlehem, and his envoys went and killed all the infants, according to the king’s order. And the king returned to Jerusalem. Many days later, there was a famine in Egypt, and Joseph, Miriam, and their children went to Canaan and settled in Nazareth, their hometown. They changed their names and created that bastard Jesus… (Ibid: 306).

In Wagenseil Manuscript No. 22v 8-22:
It was on Sunday that Yohanan went to his fiancée, and she sat beside him and touched him. Yohanan said to her, “Didn’t you tell me you were menstruating?” She replied, “You are a pious fool! Tonight you came to me twice and lay with me. And you said that a new halakha had been taught in the house of study, that it is permissible for a groom to lie with his fiancée even when she is menstruating. Now you do not want to touch me!” Yohanan was very shocked and said, “God forbid I should have touched you, even with my little finger! Besides, I was not with you last night.” Immediately she thought of Yosef Pandera. And he also thought of Yosef Pandera. She said to him, “Didn’t I tell you that you shouldn’t become friends with a wicked man, and you didn’t listen to me?” They both wept, and Yohanan left with a bitter heart. And it was after about three months that Yohanan was told, “Behold, your fiancée is pregnant.” Yohanan became very anxious, and went to Shim'on ben Shetah, his rabbi,

and told him the story and asked him what they should do. His rabbi said to him, “Whom do you suspect?” He said, “I suspect no one but Yosef Pandera, for he is a pimp and a close neighbour of my house and in my neighbourhood.” His rabbi said to him, “My son, heed my advice and remain silent. If he came to her once, it is impossible that he will not come again. Act wisely and swear to witnesses, and bring him to the Supreme Court.” The young man (Joseph) went out to his house and lamented greatly. When it became public that she (Mary) was pregnant, Yohanan said, “Now everyone will say that she is pregnant by me.” And, out of great shame and disgrace, he left the land of Israel and went to Babylon and stayed there (Ibid: 288).

III.08. The Prostitution of Mary in Egypt

In Manuscript Wasenseil, folio 22v 21-2:
Miriam gave birth and named him Yehoshia, after her uncle, her mother’s brother. The boy grew up, (22) and his mother hired a teacher for him. His name was Elhanan. And he taught the child, and he had a good heart for understanding.

In the Byzantine Manuscript, folio 22r 9-11 and 14-7:
While in Egypt, Miriam (Mary) became pregnant again through prostitution, more than once, and gave birth to other sons, Jacob, Kianesh, and Kiphimiah, the brothers of Jesus, and also daughters, sisters of Jesus. When they had been in Egypt for a long time, Joseph said to Miriam: “Now, the people of our city have forgotten the incident and its history. Let us return to our country and to our land.” They went and returned to their place with Jesus, his brothers, and his sisters 28 (Ibid: 156).

In Huldreich Manuscript, folio Ir 15-7:
Miriam (Maria) prostituted herself with Yosef Pandera ha-Notsri and gave birth (to him) to children of prostitution and bastards (ibid: 306).

[Note: As if the sin of Mary's adultery with Joseph Pandera was not enough, yet another immorality was created for Mary: that she prostituted herself while living in Egypt, in order to further tarnish her image and transform Joseph, Mary's husband and Jesus' father, into someone even more cuckolded.]

IV. Analysis: Was Mary Really a Virgin Conceived by the Holy Spirit?

IV.01. The Textual Problem

Faced with so many controversial narratives, the reader will wonder which version to believe. Most commonly, with few exceptions, the reader will believe the version according to their own affiliation, the one they were raised with, or even the one they sympathise with. If they are Catholic, Protestant, or Pentecostal, they will certainly believe in the canonical version, that is, the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, while a Gnostic or Nestorian will believe in some apocryphal Gospels, a Muslim will believe in the version of the Quran and the Hadiths, a Jew will believe in the versions of the Talmud and the Toledoth Yeshu. Meanwhile, an eclectic esotericist may believe in almost all of them, and a sceptic may distrust all of them. So the question is: Is there any impartial method to arrive at historicity? What is history and what is myth amidst this multiplicity of controversial narratives? The answer lies in historical research and textual criticism, two troublesome obstacles for religions. Since religious teachings are transmitted through sacred texts, textual research precedes any other research; that is, only after ascertaining what the authors of the texts actually said is it possible to research the meaning of what they said. Therefore, textual research must precede historical research. Researchers have increasingly strived to edit sacred texts using critical editions, the result of which is achieved after exhaustive

research comparing as many manuscripts as possible, as well as the subsequent analysis of these testimonies to determine which are closest to the original, when the autograph manuscript is not available. Therefore, it is necessary to identify textual alterations in manuscripts throughout the handwritten transcription, as this work prevents the study of interpolated ideas that the author did not express. Ancient religious texts are replete with textual and redactional alterations. It is estimated that, given the approximately five thousand known manuscripts of the New Testament, there are roughly 500,000 textual variants, excluding spelling differences.

Among modern editions of apocryphal collections, the one that revises previous publications, includes an introductory study, compares the largest number of manuscripts, and includes a critical apparatus of textual variants in the footnotes is that of Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Plese (EHRMAN, 2011). Regarding the Sefer Toledoth Yeshu collection, the most critical edition, with an introductory study, comparison of manuscripts and previous editions, and a critical apparatus of textual variants in the footnotes, is that of Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer (SCHÄFER, 2014). And for the canonical Bible, it is the 28th revised edition of Nestle-Aland (NA28). As for the Quran, Hadiths, and Talmud, it was not possible to find critical editions with manuscript comparisons and critical apparatus.

IV.02. The Historical Problem

Regarding the study of ancient and recent religions, historians make the following distinction: those that arose in the darkness of history and those that arose in the light of history. The former are those that appeared at a time when records and documentation were very precarious, a period in which almost the entire population was illiterate, or the local language did not have a written form, so that written documentation was a rarity or, in almost all cases, did not exist. Many of these religions were initially preserved in the memory of the first followers, then transmitted only

orally, to later be transcribed into written form. Or those that are known only through the version of their followers, with no surviving records from authors outside that tradition; thus, we only know these religions through the eyes of their adherents.

In contrast, the religions that emerged in the light of history are the most recent, whose appearance occurred at a time when the capacity for record-keeping was great, hence the abundant documentation. The more recent, the more plentiful the amount of records. This is because they arose at a time when printing, journalism, notary offices, photography, filmmaking, documentaries, forensic science, fingerprint identification, biometrics, etc., already existed, and history was already recogn ed as an important tool in understanding culture. Therefore, these recent religions emerged surrounded by abundant records and plentiful documents, which allow us to know them from different perspectives: that of their followers, their opponents, the press, and neutral authors, thus enabling a broader understanding of their emergence and development.

As an example, I recently watched a documentary, a National Geographic production (available on Disney+), in three episodes, about one of the best-known and, at the same time, most shocking cases we know of in history: the tragic mass suicide of over 900 followers of the People's Temple Christian sect in November 1978, in the Jonestown community in Guyana, led by the charismatic preacher Jim Jones. Regarding the matter at hand, it is curious to note the abundance of documentary and material evidence available about this event, quite different from the scarcity of impartial material and documentary evidence. This latter evidence, replete with video recordings, testimonies from surviving former members and Jim Jones' own son, audio recordings, photographs, written documents, messages and letters, video footage of assaults and murders, testimonies and books written by members who fled before the tragedy, etc., is particularly relevant. In the days leading up to the mass suicide, a US congressman, along with a group of reporters

and cameramen, were present, so almost everything was recorded, to investigate rumours of mistreatment and the prohibition of members from leaving the community – something akin to imprisonment. In short, the availability of materials is abundant.

The historicity of Mary, when perceived holistically, encompasses a range of perspectives, from the suspicion that she did not exist, since for these extremist sceptics the New Testament is a myth, to the belief that she was a virgin who gave birth to a child without carnal relations (Immaculate Conception), was the mother of God, who even after childbirth remained a virgin, and made appearances to devotees, such as the well-known accounts of the controversial apparitions in Lourdes, France, and, more suspiciously, those in the Fatima region of Portugal, to three children, as well as other less reliable apparitions around the world.

Therefore, deciding whether Mary was a virgin or not, remaining inviolate even after giving birth to a son, is a nearly impossible task due to the scarcity of sources, and the few available are testimonies from confessional authors, without impartial witness sources or documentary and material evidence. Obviously, the version that Mary was a virgin who gave birth to a son, the son of God, without sexual intercourse and remained a virgin afterward (Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels) is infinitely more impossible, therefore occurring only in myths, than the version that she was an adulterous woman who later prostituted herself (Talmud and Toledoth Yeshu collection). In short, in a time when record-keeping was very precarious, the researcher is forced to believe in religious sources; that is, Mary's virginity is a matter of faith and not of historicity.

IV.03. The Gynaecological Problem

The Immaculate Conception and many other miracles in religions are always products of the scientific and technological limitations of an era, which is why they are always subsequently demystified. Note that in this miracle, when Mary is conceived

without sexual intercourse, only the first phenomenon—that is, conception without the presence of human semen is miraculous; only the conception is supernatural and therefore unobservable. In contrast, the rest of the process—fertilisation, gestation, childbirth, post-partum, breastfeeding, nutrition, the child's growth, puberty, and reaching adulthood is physiological, natural, observable, and, if it were today, monitor able by technology.

In Antiquity and the Middle Ages, when gynaecology and knowledge of DNA, as well as gene identification technology, ultrasound of the pregnant woman's abdomen, vaginal examination, prenatal examination, and other technologies did not exist, this miracle was widely believed. However, nowadays, this miracle is easily contested, since it is possible, with current resources and the mother's willingness to undergo the examination, to discover whether conception without the presence of human semen is a fact or not. Today, we know for sure that fertilisation without the presence of semen is biologically impossible, whether it is natural fertilisation, *in vitro* fertilisation, or artificial insemination, in humans or animals; that is, the union of the male sperm with the female egg to form the zygote, the first cell of a new being, with genetic material from the parents. Therefore, consequently, the questions arise: Was Mary fertilised with "divine semen"? If tests were performed today, would this sui generis semen be identified? What is its biological composition? How does divine semen transform into a human zygote, given that the subsequent process was entirely physiologically human? Even after birth, would a genetic test on Jesus identify his divine genetics? What would be the result of his DNA test? What is the biological structure of divine DNA? If the miracle was a fraud, then would it be possible to identify who the father actually was if his blood were collected from the wounds during the crucifixion? None of these procedures existed in Jesus' time, therefore providing fertile ground for the creation of myths about divine conception in virgins.

These tests can only be performed with the consent of the pregnant woman or her family, as not all women agree. Fraudulent miracle workers always refuse to submit to scientific tests; this refusal is the biggest sign that the perpetrator is a fraud. A well-known case is that of the Indian saint, Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011), who performed materialisations of sacred ash (vibhuthi) and other objects (rings, necklaces, bracelets, watches, etc.) for almost his entire life. He never agreed to undergo controlled scientific observation tests. His fraudulent miracles had to be identified by experienced magicians and illusionists, who then reproduced them exactly in public demonstrations and videos posted on the internet. Or through modern video editing techniques, such as image zoom, slow motion, still life, slow-motion frame-by-frame projection, image enlargement, and other technical resources, such as video image conversion into computer graphics, common in volleyball challenges, which allowed for the perception of the tricks and sleight of hand and finger movements, respectively. As well as through the blatant dropping of vibhuthi clumps, used to simulate materialisation, from his hand due to carelessness, which were photographed and published on the internet, in addition to eyewitness accounts, which disappointed many devotees.

In light of this, religious leaders no longer appear today announcing that they are children of virgin mothers, conceived by God, as was the case in the past. It is intriguing to note that God only conceived (fertilised) Mary and left the rest of the fetal development process to nature, that is, subject to all the limitations of the laws of nature, so that the miracle only happened at the beginning, with the fertilisation, in a circumstance where it was not possible to confirm the exceptionality of the phenomenon through gynaecological tests. In short, it is a strategy of religions throughout history, especially the oldest ones, to always place miracles in places where it is not possible to disprove them; however, the authors of these miracles were unable to foresee the advancement of science and technology

in the future. For these reasons, this is a miracle whose current occurrence no longer has credibility today, as it can be easily refuted.

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Notes

1. The Doctrine of the Trinity is the central belief of Christianity that one God exists in three co-eternal and co-equal persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit, who are distinct but inseparable, forming one God (one divine essence). This doctrine, although based on biblical passages that describe the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, was formally formulated by the Church in the 3rd and 4th centuries, especially at the Councils of Nicaea (325 CE) and Constantinople (381 CE).

2 The Greek adjective in the plural ἀπόκρῦφα (apocrypha); Latin: apocrypha, means "hidden," "secret," therefore in this context "hidden writings." For the followers of this collection of apocrypha, especially the Gnostics, these texts include the secret teachings (apocrypha) of Jesus, although not everything is secret teaching. Although this etymological meaning does not coincide, the term is currently used today in the sense of texts of approximately the same genre that were excluded from the Old and New Testaments; from the latter, they are the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, so that there are apocrypha of these three New Testament genres in much greater number than the canonical ones.

3 was found with a child in her stomach – eurete en gastri egousa; literally: "she was found with a child in her belly".

4. From the Latin "Received Text" or "Accepted Text," it is a family of printed texts of the New Testament in Greek, which served as the basis for many later historical translations of the Bible, such as the King James Version, originating from the editions of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1615) in the 16th century, very influential in the following centuries, and consolidated with the editors Stephanus and Elzevir. Although historically crucial, it is not considered today the original

text, but rather a comparison based only on later Byzantine manuscripts, now being replaced by texts derived from older and more numerous manuscripts and testimonies. The most widely followed current edition is that of Nestle-Aland, with almost thirty revisions.

5 is also the name of the Virgo sign in the Zodiac.

6 Etymological Dictionary of Greek, Robert Beekes, vol. II, p. 1153.

7 Or a young person, who may not necessarily be a virgin.

8 According to Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Plese, this was the apocryphal text that enjoyed the most popularity at the end of Antiquity and in the Middle Ages; some apocryphal gospels were inspired by and amplified from it. (EHRMAN, 2011: 31)

9 Jerome consulted the Hebrew Bible.

10 To learn more about miracles in Jesus' childhood extracted from apocryphal texts, see: BOTELHO, 2012.

11 In order to clarify the obscurity of this phrase, some translations add: “We breathed into her 'womb' through Our Spirit (angel) Gabriel.” This is a metaphorical phrase, hence its poetic character.

12 The phrase lil'alamina, translated here as "for the peoples," is also found translated as "for (all) beings" or "for (all) worlds." Thus, recognizing the almost global expansion that Christianity had already achieved in the 7th century CE, the time of the composition of the Quran.

13 Where Mary gave birth to Jesus (Quran 19:22-6).

14 Some translations add "just like other mortals." Perhaps this phrase was placed in the Quran in order to defend against criticisms that Muhammad ate, drank, and frequented the market, therefore he was not divine. For Islam, Mary was not the mother of God, nor was Jesus the son of God; he was merely another prophet of Allah.

15. Name of an Arab tribe that resided in and controlled the city of Mecca and the Kaaba; Muhammad belonged to one of the clans of this tribe, known as Banu Hashim.

16 His name also appears as: ben Pandeira, ben Pandira or ben Pantera, sometimes as Yushu ben Pandera (Jesus son of Pandera),

and his father's name as: Panthera, Pantera, Pantere, Pandera, Pandira, Panther and Pantheras (TIJSSELING, 2022: 81n16).

17 Pandera was a Roman soldier with whom Mary had a relationship and fathered Jesus. However, some authors suggest that the term Pandera or Pantera is a distortion of the Greek word παρθένος-pantheros, which means "virgin," so that the terms ben Pandera would mean "son of the Virgin" and not the son of a Roman soldier named Pandera.

18. The Talmudic manuscripts, found by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, had passages offensive to Jesus and Christianity erased or scraped away by Christian censorship. However, some Jewish manuscripts escaped persecution and retained their original wording.

19 He lived from 217-309 CE, therefore about two centuries after the events of the New Testament.

20 A city in Babylon where there was a Jewish school.

21. Betrayed.

22 In the Talmudic passage Gittin 90a: "… And this is comparable to the behavior of Pappos ben Yehuda in relation to his wife, for he would lock the door in front of his wife and go out so that she would not see any other man (William Davidson edition). "This corresponds to the manner of Papus b. Judah who used to, when he went out, lock his wife inside the house" (Soncino edition).

23 Some editions add "his ministry," but the phrase is not present in the original Greek.

24 This is the best known, most read and most translated version, as it brings together the ideas of the other versions while adding new details.

25 Between Maria and Pandera.

26. Location unknown.

27 Here there is a confusion, referring to Joseph as "Yosef Pander, husband of Mary, and not to the perverted Yosef Pandera," this passage was probably taken from the Babylonian Talmud Shabbath 104b, where there is confusion about the parents of Yeshu (Jesus).

28 While in the Canonical Gospels Joseph and his family went to Egypt to escape Herod's persecution, in the Toledoth Yeshu the family went to that region in order to escape the stigma in their hometown, due to Mary's adultery.